

DATE A LIVE ENCORE

SpiritNo.10

Height 155 Three size B84/W58/H83

橘公司

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ファンタジア文庫

デート・ア・ライブ アンコール

DATE A LIVE ENCORE



Dating Preparations Case 1: Yoshino

Yoshino stood in front of the large mirror in her room uneasily. Her one-piece dress had no wrinkles. Her hair did not have any strands that were out of place. After examining every part of her body carefully, she put the large brimmed sun hat on her head and turned around once in front of the mirror.

She was wearing clothes that she liked very much as well as the hat that she cherished. Every inch of her body was clean, and there was no problem at all. But for some reason she became extremely jumpy, repeatedly inspecting her garments.

“I say, Yoshino. You’re still not done yet? It’s almost time already...”

Just as Yoshino was about to repeat the same thing again, Yoshinon the rabbit puppet in her left hand opened its mouth and voiced out in displeasure.

“Ah... I’m sorry, Yoshinon but... I don’t look... weird, do I...?”

“There’s no problem. After all, it’s just going next door to eat.. But Yoshino, you’d always do this every time we’re about to go to Shido-kun’s house.”

“...! T-that’s not true...”

“Is that so?”

“U-uuh...”

Yoshino groaned and pulled down on her hat, trying to hide her face away. Yoshinon could only shrug.

“If you like him that much, then Yoshino you should just take the lead and ask him out. Won’t that just solve everything?”

“! Th-that sort of thing— I can’t do it...”

“Eh, but you really want to go on a date with Shido-kun right?”

“Th-that’s true... I really want to go on a date with him...but...”

Just as Yoshino said that line, the corner of Yoshinon’s mouth rose. It then rummaged around its stomach before finally extracting a small device.

“...! Th-that is...”

「デイト準備。自費。」
四谷乃乃は、自分だけ受けた宿屋の前で、朝しな顔を作っていた。髪のもに汗ね、ワンスパンに纏へない。髪のもに汗ね
「んふ、それらを今人りに確認してからう。つばの広さを測りながら帽子を作り、鏡の前でその身体を回覧させ、お気に入りの服を着る。お気に入りの靴をはく。何も問題は無いはずであるが、なぜか不安になつて、何處までも歩みに迷込んでしまふのだ。
「おい、四谷さん。まだやう。もう時間になつてしまふよ」
四谷乃乃そんな動作を繰り返しているとの、手に着きかけた手帕を振り返して、「よし」といふが、口をバタバタさせるながら不満げな声を出してゐた。
「あー……、あん、よしのん、でも出て……、さあ、ないかな……？」

「はいじふだてば、晩ご馳走上にあひまけですまし。……、四谷乃乃王道んトツに行くといふはいつもうんだから……」
「そ、そんな、……」
「ないのり」
「う、うう……」
四谷乃乃小さくなりながら走らむ帽子をつばを引き上げ、顔を隠すようにして、すると『よしのん』が、ややれやと肩をすくめてくる。
「ここまではなるなら、四谷乃乃かデイトなり何りしろ。ちゃんえいはいい……」
「そ、そんな、わり……」
「えい、でも、デイトはしたくないですか？」「そ、それは……たい……」
と、四谷乃乃が一言二言の間、『よしのん』がゴソに取組の中を端取り、小さな機械を取り出してみせる。

「……っ！……、そ、それ……」
「んふ、ホントスレコッダーだよ。この前合資金に使つた方敷ももらつんだ。今の言葉、パツパツ繰られていたたまりました」
「……」
「……」
四谷乃乃息を詰もらせ、それを奪い取るうづ手を伸ばした。「あ、よしのん」は軽やかに身を揺らし、それを握る。
「よ、よしのん……」
「……」
「作ってあるべきでは、よしのんがこれです」
「よしのん」を誇ってあげた。
「だ、だめ……」
「その後、なんとか『よしのん』からスイスルッダを取り出すことには成功したのだが、髪がくしくし、服はしわびわになつてしまつた。
だけれど私は今はそんな四谷乃乃を見て、「お國元の領土は見たもの、可愛いぞ」と言ってくれた。

Dating Preparations Case 2: Kotori Itsuka

“...Hm—”

Kotori was inside the office of <Ratatoskr>, staring at the black and white ribbons placed on the desk while making a troubled sound. Needless to say, because the two different types of ribbons were placed on the desk, the current Kotori did not tie her hair up. her long hair covered her back past her shoulders, creating a different air to her compared to her usual self. Just as Kotori hugged her head while in a loss, the door to the office suddenly opened.

“...Kotori, regarding this case... hm?”

Reine spoke as she walked into the room.

“!”

Kotori held her breath, grabbing the black ribbons on the table, tied up her hair with amazing speed.

“Rei-Reine... You ought to knock before entering.”

“...Hm? Aahh, sorry. I forgot... Then again, what were you doing?”

“Ugh...”

Kotori began to stutter, but it was useless to keep it a secret from Reine. She shrugged her shoulders and sighed.

“...Tomorrow, I’m going shopping with Shido, but I don’t know which ribbon to wear.”

Kotori had imposed two different personalities upon herself. She was the innocent little sister when the white ribbons were worn and she would be the strong commander when black ribbons were worn. However, it’s precisely because of this... after Shido had witnessed Kotori with her two distinct personalities, she felt lost whenever she went out with him.

If she wore her white ribbons she could be believed to be acting coy... but she may be seen to be too harsh on him if she were to wear her black ribbons. After Kotori finished saying her piece, Reine felt troubled as she scratched her cheek.

“...Actually it doesn’t matter doesn’t it? If you can’t make a decision no matter what, then just close your eyes and choose one.”

“What you say is true... but...”

“...Is your older brother the sort of man that would hate his little sister for the color of her ribbons?”

“...!”

After hearing Reine's words, Kotori's eyes widened... quickly shrugging her shoulders.

“You're right, I was thinking too much.”

Saying that, Kotori untied the black ribbons that were on her head and placed them beside the white ribbons, mixing them up after closing her eyes.

“Now, which one should I... choose!” After grabbing the ribbons, she opened her eyes.

“...Ah.”

In her hands... were two ribbons, one black, the other white.

“...In this situation, what will come out of it then?”



Dating Preparations Case 3: Origami Tobiichi

After the practice battle in the base. Once the feeling of fatigue eased from using the personal Territory, Origami slowly stood up. In order to remove her battle suit, she made her way towards her locker at a snail's pace. If she had used her emergency clothes changing unit, changing would only be a split second, however that unit would only be used during emergencies, that's because using it results in a massive burden on the brain. Origami would not use it if she could help it.

Just as Origami reached her own locker, she noticed that quite a number of her teammates had reached there before her. They were all teammates that had participated in the practice battle just now. Origami lightly raised her hand in greeting, after which she opened her own locker, taking out her clothes and bag. Soon after, her teammates on both sides glanced at her clothes.

“Eh? Master Sergeant Tobiichi, it seems like your clothes have been specially picked today.”

“Ah, it's true. Your bag is cute too. “

Origami nodded her head casually.

“Today I have a date after this.”

As soon as Origami ended her words, the young team members cried out.

“Waah, really? Eh—hold on, I thought only Master Sergeant, you would never be conquered by a guy—”

“Squad Leader! I suggest that we conduct a check on Master Sergeant Tobiichi's personal belongings!”

“Hm, approved!”

With permission granted the AST members all crowded around. Although Origami had no intention of hiding her relationship with Shido. Origami did not make any attempts of resistance at all, she handed her bag over. However, after a few seconds. The team members who originally had eyes sparkling with expectations soon had troubled expressions.

“U-um... Master Sergeant Tobiichi. This small bottle is...”

“It's used to mix inside his food. One drop will increase his energy by a hundred fold.”

“Then this liquid that gives off such a pungent odor is...”

“In case of emergency, I'll soak a cloth with that and cover his nose and mouth with it.”



DATE A LIVE ENCORE



Game centerTOHKA, ImpossibleORIGAMI, FireworksYOSHINO,
BirthdayKOTORI, Star FestivalKURUMI

精霊

THE SPIRIT

隣界に存在する特殊災害指定生命体。発生原因、存在理由ともに不明。
こちらの世界に現れる際、空間震を発生させ、周囲に甚大な被害を及ぼす。
また、その戦闘能力は強大。

対処法1

WAYS OF COPING 1

武力を以てこれを殲滅する。
ただし前述の通り、非常に高い戦闘能力を持つため、達成は困難。

対処法2

WAYS OF COPING 2

——デートして、デレさせる。

デート・ア・ライブ アンコール

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Tohka Game Center

“Origami Tobiichi, You stupid dummy—!”

—Bang!

While roaring, a fist connected with its target at a speed that was too quick for anyone to quickly cover their eyes and ears.

In the next moment, the fist connected with the stand: piercing the LCD screen in front and tearing a hole through the machine.

Slowly, the broken wires let off a few weak sparks and the now destroyed screen exploded, leaving a trail of smoke in its wake.

“A-Ah...!”

The sudden explosion made Itsuka Shido, who had seen what happened in front of him stare with his eyes so wide in shock that they might just fall out of their sockets.

Currently in a game center in Tenguu City.

The game console with boxing gloves and targets—which was to say, the boxing machine.

“Haah, I feel much better now.”

Tohka Yatogami let out a sigh as she spoke, she then pulled off the gloves that had pierced past the machine and tossed them onto what was left of the machine.

She had a slender body, hair as dark as the night sky, and crystalline colored eyes.

If life was kind, then such beauty may be possible in this world.

In front of the girl was a damaged boxing machine that continued to play the trumpet sound despite being heavily damaged. This was surely a surreal situation.

The other guests around were similarly dumbfounded.

“Y-Yeah... th-that’s really good to hear...”

As Shido responded while sweat trickled down his face, he could hear the sound of footsteps from behind him.

“Hello...guest! Hey, what do you think you’re doing! What a pain!”

The man who seemed to be a staff member at the game center rushed over in a flurry of panic.

“Huh?”

“Ah... It’s no good!”

But—

“...Huh?”

The staff member stopped just short of reaching Shido and Tohka.

The reason was obvious. Because there was a dark skinned man dressed in black who appeared to be more than 2 meters tall and appeared as though he intended to prevent him from moving forward.

“You... what are you...”

“Don’t be rude. Let’s talk over there...”

“Huh? Hey, wait a minute...huh? N-No, stop it! A-A-Ah!”

Shido could only watch as the staff member let out a wail of protest as he was dragged away by the much taller man.

“What happened just now?”

“...No... I don’t know.”

Although Shido responded to Tohka in the way he had... but he actually had a suspicion who the man actually was.

Sure enough... From the earpiece clipped in his right ear, he could hear a young girl’s voice in his ear.

[“—We’ll clear out any obstacles in your path. You can relax while you continue the date. Let Tohka get a chance to relax a little bit.”]

“...Got it.”

Shido answered quietly in order to prevent Tohka from overhearing him.

This was surely a lovely date for an after school setting.

It all started earlier in the day.

“Tonomachi, what’s that thing on your phone?”

Classes had ended for the day. While all of their classmates had started to make their way home in twos and threes, Shido was busy organizing the contents of his school bag as he spoke to his classmate: Hiroto Tonomachi.

“Hmm? Are you talking about this?”

Tonomachi waved the cell phone in his hand while running his fingers through his hair, styled with liberal use of gel.

The animal charm attached to the corner of the phone shook.

“It’s cute. It’s a colorful animal charm.”

“Right... Be careful not to commit the crime of displaying obscene objects.”

“Don’t you think this is the best character design? How would this be considered obscene?!”

“Oh... sorry, I just spoke unconsciously...”

Shido apologized while smiling bitterly. “It can’t be helped.” Tonomachi shrugged and answered:

“I have more of them. Do you want one? It seems like this series is very popular right now. If you hang it on your phone, girls will surely come in droves!” Tonomachi finished as he pulled out a paper bag from his uniform pocket. Inside were charms sealed in a simple plastic packaging.

“Ah? So you have two of them?”

“No, I won this from the game center. The last time I was there, I managed to get two in one try.”

“Wow, this is amazing.”

Shido stared at the thing that Tonomachi brought.

...The eyes looked a little too real for his taste and he didn’t think that they were very cute.

“...But never mind. I’m not into that.”

“You’re not? I think it’s cute.”

“Ah, well, I think this one’s cute.”

Shido pointed to the panda bear mascot printed on the back of the packaging.

“Ah, you’re a fan of the dream panda [Panda Ronnie]. He is a good friend and seems very good at playing with a ball.”

“I don’t know about all of that. But if I had to pick one, I think I would pick this one.”

“It’s a pity that I don’t have that one. I’ve tried to get it a few times but the way that he’s positioned makes it difficult to win and the clerks aren’t at all helpful.”

“Right.”

Shido responded in that way at that time.

“—What did you say?!”

Suddenly there was such a loud roar in the rear and Shido’s shoulders trembled.

“W-What happened...?”

He looked behind him, shoulders trembling and spotted two female students arguing with each other.

“No... that can’t be true...! You bastard, if you keep spouting nonsense, I won’t spare you next time!”

“I’m just telling the truth.”

“Shut up! Who would believe such things!”

“It’s you who is being loud. Be quiet.”

“What are you talking about!”

“Are you done?”

It seemed that the two sides had no intention of giving in to each other.

On one side was Tohka, and on the other side was a girl with an expression like that of a doll and replying calmly: Origami Tobiichi.

She boasted excellent grades and was incredible at sports. She was the perfect superhuman to be the pride of Shido’s class.

“All of a sudden... what happened...”

Shido turned around and noticed that Tonomachi’s figure seemed to have vanished.

“T-That guy...”

It seemed that he’d encountered something troublesome.

Shido sighed loudly.

Although he didn’t know the reason for their quarrel, they can’t seem to let it go. Shido spoke fearfully:

“H-Hello...”

“Hello!”

“How are you?”

Shido spoke to them and almost immediately Tohka and Origami turned their gazes on him at the same time.

Although he flinched for a moment: Shido mustered enough courage to continue the conversation:

“C-Calm down, what happened between you two?”

As Shido asked, Tohka and Origami clashed with each other again.

...He’d always noticed that they seemed to act like this and their conflict seemed to make the air vibrate slightly.

“—I just said something that is often taken for granted. It was Tohka Yatogami who lacked understanding.”

“What are you talking about! After all, It’s your fault—”

“J-Just calm down, okay?”

“...Hmph!”

As Shido stepped between the two of them, Tohka simply turned away and with a scoff, sat down in her seat.

“...”

Origami, on the other hand, Origami simply walked out of the classroom without another word.

“Ah... what’s this?”

—At that moment, Shido’s eyebrows shot up.

“...Huh?”



The name displayed on the phone's screen was "Kotori Itsuka": Shido's younger sister.

Once Shido made his way to an isolated corner of the classroom, he pressed the call button.

"—Hey? What's wrong, Kotori?"

["How dare you ask such a question as "What's wrong", you jerk!"]

"..."

Almost immediately after hitting the call button, Shido received a vicious scolding from her.

Shido's face twitched slightly.

...Since when had Kotori switched into her <Commander Mode>?

["—Just now, Tohka's mental state started to rapidly fall!"]

"What...?"

Shido frowned and replied in such a way. Kotori, in turn, sighed and continued:

["Didn't I already warn you to be careful? Although most of her Spirit Power has been sealed, but because she is Spirit and is an existence powerful enough to cause natural disasters, if her mental state becomes unstable, the sealed power may reverse and flow back into her."]

"...!"

After listening to what Kotori said, Shido gulped nervously.

That's right. Just like Kotori said: Tohka was not an ordinary human girl.

She was an existence called a Spirit and the reason behind why she appeared and her existence remained unclear.

For now, her powers had been sealed away and she was currently under the protection of Kotori's organization <Ratatoskr> but for Shido who'd once witnessed her overwhelming power, this was surely a terrible situation.

["So, I want to know why her mental state suddenly became so unstable—Shido, what perverted things did you do to her?"]

"Why are you assuming that it had something to do with what I did?"

["So what do you think happened?"]

“Oh... well, she had a big fight with Origami.”

“When you say Origami, do you mean Tobiichi Origami of the AST?”

“Yes.”

The AST also known as the Anti-Spirit Team.

Unlike Kotori and <Ratatoskr>, they are the special forces to deal with the Spirits by eliminating them by force.

Origami Tobiichi was not just a high school student but also one of the few talented members of the AST.

Now that Tohka’s powers were sealed, she wouldn’t attack her openly again—but even so, it seemed that the relationship between them was still poor.

“Hmm, true love troubles—never mind. I guess it can’t be helped if things have already reached this point. Shido, focus on stabilizing Tohka’s mental state.”]

“Her mental state... ah...”

Shido spoke as he looked at Tohka.

...There was an aura of darkness surrounding her. If a sapling was placed next to her, it would likely wither away instantly.

“Even if you ask me to do that...”

[“The hell are you talking about? Isn’t it obvious? Take her out on a date. Now that I think about... why don’t you take her to the game center to help relieve her stress—Don’t worry, we will support you.”]

“What!”

[“Then, I’ll get everything set up beforehand. You need to hurry up!”]

Kotori arbitrarily made the decision before Shido could get a word in as she hung up the phone.

“...”

Although there were many things he still wanted to say, there’s no point talking about it now.

Shido put his phone away and took a deep breath before making his way to where Tohka was.

“H-Hey, Tohka.”

“...Muu?”

Tohka replied unhappily.

Although he felt nervous for a moment, Shido strengthened his resolve as he stayed in place and continued to speak:

“...No, that... If you don't mind, do you want to go out together with me?”

“Muu?”

The moment that Shido finished speaking, he could feel that the frustration that Tohka had built up seemed to fade away little by little.

“Go out... that is to say, Shido, do you want to take me on a date?”

Tohka seemed to be anxiously waiting for Shido's response. His gaze drifted upwards when she asked.

...Well, she was right. But then again... it was a little embarrassing when put like that. Shido scratched his cheek awkwardly in agreement.

“Ah... That's right.”

After Shido finished speaking, Tohka stood up from her seat, her expression much brighter than it had been previously.

“Oh...! Let's go!”

“O-Oh! Yeah, let's go.”

“So, where are we going?”

“Hmm... why don't we go to the game center?”

“Game center?”

Tohka looked confused as she tilted her head.

“Uh...In short, it has many interesting things like ‘games’.”

“Oh, is it fun?”

“Yeah, there are games like boxing machines and whack a mole. It will be fun and relaxing to play.”

“Not only fun but it’s also relaxing! What other games do they have there?”

“Now that I think about it, it would be pretty difficult to play fighting games if you haven’t played them before... Oh, there are also dancing games, if we play in beginner mode, you should be able to play it.”

“Music games?”

“Yeah. It’s like dancing where you use your feet to step on the arrow-painted control panel, or tapping a drum-shaped controller with a stick. If you like those, it can be relaxing.”

“Are there others?!”

“There are other games that use machines to grab snacks too.”

“Wow...! I can still get snacks from there...! Isn’t that super incredible!”

“Yeah, really incredible.”

“I could live there!”

Faced with Tohka’s shining expression, Shido smiled bitterly.

“That might be a challenge... after all, people under the age of 18 can’t go out after 10:00 in the evening.”

“Muu, is that true?”

“Yeah, according to the customs laws and the like. Ah, you have to remember this other thing: because the family register that Kotori prepared for you has your age set at 16 years old, you can’t go just to the Game Center but outside in the middle of the night.”

“Umu, I will remember.”

Tohka finished as she crossed her arms thoughtfully. It seemed that he may have given her too much information in one sitting.

Perhaps it was because of Tohka’s enthusiasm that a group of girls still in the classroom approached the two of them.

“Hey Hey What are you two talking about?”

“Huh? Oh, uh...”

After being confronted like this, Shido scratched his cheek awkwardly.

Just as he was about to speak, Tohka spoke up first:

“I’ll tell you, just wait a minute, Shido is going to take me to a fun place!”

The girls who’d heard this sentence glanced at Shido with smiles on their faces.

“Hmm... could it be that you’re expressing your love for her?”

“Ahh! It’s so cute, so cute!”

“Itsuka-kun really is dedicated...”

“No... that...”

...What could he say, they’d struck a nerve. Shido’s cheeks flushed a deep red as he turned his gaze away from them.

“Hey, hey, Tohka, you said a fun place, where exactly are you going?”

One of the girls asked Tohka.

“Muu?” Tohka uttered as she thought for a moment. Her eyes widened as she began to speak one she remembered.

“Muu... where were we going again? I remember it was supposed to be fun... Ah, yes! We’re going to a place where we can’t get in unless we’re 18!”

“What...?”

Hearing what Tohka said, the girls froze.

“...! Tohka, that’s not true! That only applies after 10:00 pm in the evening—!”

“Muu? Is that true?”

Even though Shido was quick to correct her, the girls didn’t seem to hear them.

They exchanged looks with each other and started muttering amongst themselves.

“Talking about places prohibited from entering while under the age of 18...”

“Sure enough, it has to be a love hotel, right...?”

“No, maybe it’s the kind of place that’s mainly open at night...”

“Y-You’re misunderstanding it!”

Shido was quick to protest the injustice as loudly as he could.

Tohka noticed Shido's response and thought that she said something odd so she seemed to clarify Shido's explanation.

"Although I don't know what everyone is thinking... but you're wrong. Shido just wants to make me feel relaxed."

"What...!"

"By the way, he said it would be relaxing if I stepped on it with my foot and beat it with a stick!"

"..."

The female students grabbed Tohka's hand, putting her behind them as though to protect her from Shido.

"W-What? What's wrong?"

After Tohka stared at the girls in confusion for a moment, the girls frowned, glanced away and shook their heads.

"It's okay, Tohka. We already understand everything."

"Fortunately, we found out about this in advance... Otherwise, the innocent and ignorant Tohka would have become a victim of pervasion."

"...That's so gross! You have no shame!"

Of course these final words were intended for Shido.

"No, that's not what I meant! I was just saying—!"

As soon as Shido opened his mouth to protest anew, the girls spread out their arms to protect Tohka.

...And almost immediately was regarded as an enemy of women.

"You are wrong! Shido is not a bad guy!"

Tohka spoke in a panic.

"Tohka is such a good girl... Because of this, Itsuka-kun, who was aware of this, tried to take advantage of the situation..."

However, it seemed the girls were too far gone to listen to her.

Nonetheless, Tohka tried her best to erase their suspicions about Shido but she ultimately groaned and slammed her hand on the desk.

“...! By the way, Shido said that if I went there with him, he would give me snacks! Does that make sense? Is everything fine now?”

“...”

The girls remained silent for a moment while glaring hard at Shido.

“...No, that...”

Even if they weren't saying it aloud, it was obvious they had a mental image of Shido saying, “Hey! Hey! Hey! Miss, if you come with me, I'll give you a delicious snack!”

Just then, Shido's cell phone rang again—it was Kotori.

“...Ah, let me answer the phone.”

Shido informed the girls as he answered the call.

“...Yes?”

[“What are you doing? Slowpoke. Hurry up and get the date started.”]

“Ah... we encountered an unexpected obstacle...”

[“I don't want to hear you make excuses. I'll only give you three minutes to get off the school grounds.”]

“Hey, wait a minute—”

He heard the click and beep indicating that she'd hung up without so much as giving him a chance to explain.

“...”

He'd better hurry. After all, this was the <Commander Mode> Kotori that he was dealing with here. If he and Tohka didn't get out in the next three minutes, there was surely going to be a severe punishment waiting for him.

“...Tohka! Let's go!”

Shido put away her cell phone and called out to her.

“Umu!”

Tohka, who originally looked troubled as she watched the situation unfold, looked more cheerful as she forced her way through the girls back to Shido's side, pausing at her desk only to grab her school bag.

Once Shido was sure that Tohka was at his side, he immediately fled the classroom with Tohka in tow.

“Ah...! Tohka!”

“Hey you cheater! Get back here!”

“Tohka! Please come back! Tohka is about to be defiled—!”

It sounded like they were about to say something dangerous as their voices became more faint and Shido did his best to ignore them and ran as fast as he could.

Which brought them to now:

Shido and Tohka had attracted attention from the other guests in the Game Center as they walked around at a leisurely pace.

The reason for this increased attention was obvious:

That's right because Tohka has managed to completely destroy the boxing machines, the whack-a-mole, and the other games that required physical fitness.

Of course, in this case, the term 'broken' was being used literally here which made the attention that they were drawing more understandable.

“Wow! These games are really fun!”

“Yeah... they are...”

Shido heard what Tohka said as she smiled innocently while he responded with a weak smile.

At the same time, he muttered into the earpiece:

“...Hey, Kotori, is this really okay?”

[“Yes. <Ratatoskr> can handle everything afterwards. Although it's not good that there's a lot of attention on the two of you, but for now, our biggest priority is that Tohka can relieve her stress.”]

“That's good...”

“Shido?”

“...! W-What?”

Tohka spoke from her place next to him and gently tapped his shoulder.

After glancing at Shido with a puzzled look, she looked around at the game center again.

“What game should we play next?”

“A-Ah, what game should we play next...”

Shido glanced around at the remaining games, then...

[“Wait just a moment.”]

He heard Kotori’s voice from the earpiece.

“—Okay, what should we play next?”

These words echoed throughout the bridge of the <Fraxinus> that was gliding 15,000 meters above Tenguu City.

Kotori Itsuka leaned back in her chair, a chupa chups in her mouth.

She was a young girl with long red hair tied into two long twin tails and was dressed in a red military uniform with the jacket draped over her shoulders.

She was clearly the youngest person on this bridge, but despite that, she was seated in the commander’s seat of the <Fraxinus>

“—Reine, how is Tohka’s mood?”

When Kotori asked, Reine Murasame, the head analyst who was operating a console on the lower bridge, rubbed the dark circles around her eyes as she spoke:

“...Well, it looks like the values are good so it isn’t a problem now. Although she continues to damage the machines, her powers have gradually stabilized.”

The screen on the center of the bridge now showed an image of Tohka’s upper body. Then around her, there were rows listed with various values such as ‘mood’ or ‘favorability’. There was even a dialogue window open. It was something straight out of a visual novel.

“Really? That’s good to hear.”

“...Yeah. But there’s still one thing I’m concerned about.”

“What is it?”



“...Although her mood has improved, it seems her uneasiness numbers are still high. It looks like she may be worried about something.”

“Worried about something—Shido, can you think of anything?”

Kotori spoke through the microphone. Shido’s response was just as prompt.

“No, at least not off the top of my head.”

“Really? That’s useless.”

“Never mind. Let’s just let her keep playing for a while longer and see what happens.”

The moment Kotori finished speaking, a new window appeared at the center of the screen with a list of choices:

- (1) The two of them work together to play a guessing game!
- (2) Play the game of detection fit and recognize the bond between the two again!
- (3) Take a picture together and leave sweet memories!

The artificial intelligence of the <Fraxinus> was able to assess Tohka’s mental state and proposed a series of options that would fit the situation.

“—So this is what we have to work with. What is your choice?”

In less than five seconds after Kotori spoke, the device in her hand showed an image of a bar graph.

The crew on the bridge were quick to make the decision and submitted it to Kotori’s terminal.

The choice with the most votes was—(3).

“Hmm, it looks like everyone seems to agree then.”

“There’s no need to discuss why (1) is out: you might get frustrated because you can’t guess the correct answer.” The vice-commander who was standing behind Kotori explained.

“...Although (2) is not a bad option, but if it turns out that they aren’t compatible with each other, it would only make things awkward between them. (3) is perfect because not only do they get a souvenir featuring the two of them, they will also become attached to the photos. Plus they’ll be able to get some privacy in that confined space concealed by the curtain.”

This was Reine’s explanation.

“That’s our best approach—Shido, take Tohka to the photo booth and take some cute pictures together.”

“...I understand. But I... I don’t know how to use the sticker machine.”

“There are instructions written there. Don’t waste time talking, get moving.”

“...Got it.”

“—Tohka, do you want to go over there?”

“Muu, alright.”

Shido accepted <Ratatoskr>’s instructions as he guided Tohka toward the photo booth.

“...? Shido, what is this?”

“”A-Ah, in simple terms, it’s a machine that can take cute pictures.”

“What...!”

Shido explained in a simple way. However, Tohka’s eyes went wide and her cheeks turned red.

“Y-You said pictures...?”

“Huh? Tohka, are you okay?”

“...No, I don’t really like having my picture taken like this...”

“Huh? Is that so?”

Shido asked as Tohka nodded, her face flushed.

“Well, if that’s the case, then why don’t we play something else?”

“Muu...”

However, Tohka mumbled to herself for a moment as though deep in thought. After a moment’s hesitation, she spoke:

“...Shido, do you want my picture?”

“Eh...? A-Ah, of course, I want it...”

Shido’s answer was a little unclear so Tohka took a deep breath as if to calm herself down and then looked with Shido who’d since turned his gaze to the ceiling.

“...Just this once, I’ll do it for you, Shido.”

“A-Ah, okay...”

Shido suddenly felt a wave of calm sweep over him for some reason and nodded at the same time. Tohka walked into the photo booth labeled “Full-body shot”.

Shido intended to follow her inside, however—

“...! W-Wait, Shido, why are you coming in?!”

He found himself stopped by Tohka.

“Huh? Are you supposed to do these sorts of things together?”

“Don’t... Just stop talking nonsense! Just wait for me outside!”

After Tohka finished speaking, she drew the curtain.

“A-Ah...”

Shido lightly tapped the earpiece as he tried to figure out how to deal with this.

“Let’s just wait for her. Once she’s done, just take a picture with both of you.”

“Ah... right...”

Shido nodded slightly as he rested against the machine where Tohka walked in.

...However, after waiting for a while, nothing seemed to happen.

“...Hey, Kotori, does it usually take a while to take a picture?”

[“It depends on how things go. The latest models let you add text and other filters after taking the picture. If you want a really beautiful photo, it will take some time.”]

“Wow... such an incredible machine... But where did Tohka learn how to use it?”

“Who knows. But I know that Tohka has had her picture taken before. I think it was when <Ratatoskr> took her photo while we were working on her protection...”

Just as Shido and Kotori were discussing this, the photo printout installed on the outside of the machine spit out the printed photo sticker.

“Um...? Have you finished having your picture taken?”

Shido bent down to pick up the sticker—

“Pffft...!”

His entire face immediately turned red.

[“What’s wrong, Shido?”]

Shido quickly hid the picture in his hand in his school bag.

The reason why was obvious: the picture featured Tohka’s naked figure.

‘Tohka! What the hell are you doing—’

Shido was confused by the unexpected turn of events and immediately pulled the curtain open.

At that moment, Shido immediately regretted his carelessness.

Because that kind of photo just came out, it meant—

“—!”

“Why...!”

Shido felt his body freeze as he threw the curtain open.

She’d clearly intended to put her clothes back on. When he opened the curtain, she was clad only in her underwear and was busy pulling on her long black socks. She wore nothing else; her dark hair was splayed across the hardwood bench.

“K-Kotori... the photo she had taken for <Ratatoskr>...”

[“Ah, yeah, she was basically naked for that one. Ah, rest assured, only female staff members were allowed to help her.”]

“N-No, that’s not the issue here—”

[“Ara? Haven’t you closed the curtain yet? Stupid...!”]

“AAAAAAHH!”

Shido’s face was devastated by the Spirit.

“...”

Meanwhile in another part of the game center.

Origami was silently operating the buttons of a skill crane machine.

Needless to say, among the prizes inside were the panda Ronnie cell phone charm of the dream panda that Shido mentioned before.

There were three colors in total: the ordinary panda color, red, and the inverted colored black and white.

—That’s right. She happened to overhear the conversation between Shido and his friend after school that day.

After all, she hadn’t stayed behind to eavesdrop on Shido and then gotten into an argument with Yatogami Tohka. Definitely not.

“...”

The robot arm barely grazed over the negative color form of panda Ronnie’s head—still not captured.

However, Origami’s expression remained unchanged as she inserted another coin.

At that moment.

A “ding-dong” sound could be heard from the entire game center.

“W-What happened?”

“Ah, it looks like there’s a couple playing too harshly with the boxing machines and the gloves are dangling inside.”

“Really? What, is the boyfriend a professional boxer or something?”

“No, it seems that the girlfriend went overboard.”

“W-What is it like right now?”

“...”

—It sounded like a very troublesome couple. Origami mused as she continued to operate the crane silently.

If it were her and Shido Itsuka, there was no doubt that they wouldn’t be doing this kind of thing.

Instead, they would have been enjoying a quiet cup of tea in an outdoor cafe.

“...”

At that moment, the robotic crane managed to catch the negative color panda Ronnie and moved it toward the exit but ended up dropping it halfway.

While unfortunate, it was nonetheless still in a good position and would be easy to capture on her next attempt.

—She tried to insert another coin but her fingers stopped.

It seemed that she'd run out of game tokens.

“...”

Origami had no choice but to run to the currency exchange machine.

“...Sorry...”

“No, It was my fault...”

Tohka, who was now fully dressed, apologized to Shido, who responded in kind while touching his now swollen cheeks.

“But... Anyway, now you know, you don't have to take off your clothes while having your picture taken.”

“...Umu... I'll remember that.”

Tohka nodded, her frustration clear on her face.

[“Ahahaha! Looks like your face wasn't fully beaten in! You're really lucky, Shido!”]

He could hear Kotori's cheerful voice in his ear.

He tapped on the earpiece in protest and she continued onward.

[“—Anyway, it looks like Tohka's mental state has stabilized. We've achieved our goal. Now, as long as you manage to figure out how to lower her anxiety value, things will be back to normal for now.”]

“...Anxiety...”

Shido looked at Tohka and tilted his head.

“—Huh?”

Tohka's gaze was fixed on the crane game machine on the right side.

“Tohka? What’s wrong?”

“Shido? How do you play this?”

“Ah... after you press that button...”

Shido quickly explained how to play the game and then glanced at the prizes in the crane game machine. The previously mentioned panda Ronnie mobile phone charm was present and was each individually packaged.

“—Maybe it’s that feeling...”

“Umu.”

Tohka said as she pulled out a 100-yen coin from her wallet and inserted it into the machine.

She then operated the machine just like Shido taught her to and moved the robotic arm.

However—even without catching the prize.

“Muu... this is so hard...”

“It’s hard to play this game... If you want, I could get it for you?”

When Shido suggested this, Tohka shook her head vigorously.

“No, that would be nonsense. Let me play.”

“So that’s it—Ah, why don’t you try to grab that? It’s positioned well.”

“Muu?”

Tohka’s gaze locked onto what Shido was pointing at

Indeed where he was pointing was the inverted colors Ronnie placed at a wonderful angle. If she could successfully hook the claw around the hole in the plastic packaging, she could definitely catch it.

“Oh!”

Tohka’s eyes lit up once more as she inserted another 100-yen coin.

She then pressed the buttons and managed to get the robot arm to hook around the hole in the plastic packaging.

“Oh! I got it, Shido!”

“Yeah, that was really amazing! Even if the position was good, you still managed to catch on the second try!”

“Well, something like that...”

At that moment, Tohka suddenly stopped speaking.

Although the robot arm returned to the top to deposit the prize out, the prize did not fall.

“Muu... what’s going on?”

“Ah... it looks like it’s stuck. If you run into a situation like this, just tell the clerk—”

“Hmph!”

Just as Shido was partway through the sentence, he could hear a loud thud.

He didn’t need to think about the cause because he already knew: Tohka had punched a hole through the plastic window of the crane game machine.

“...Tohka...”

“Umu.”

Tohka removed the panda Ronnie charm hooked on the robot arm casually and nodded in satisfaction.

“Muu, let’s go home, Shido.”

“O-Okay, let’s go home.”

“...”

After exchanging the money, Origami quickly made her way back to the crane game machine and froze on the spot.

The reason was obvious—now there was a giant hole in the machine where Origami had been playing. More importantly, it looked like the inverted color panda Ronnie was also gone.

“Who did this...?”

She spoke quietly.

However—

“Come on! Excuse us! Right here!”

With those noises, there were several workers who'd just entered the game center and immediately went to work replacing the previously damaged machines with the brand new replacements from their transport.

The new machines were brought in immediately while the old machines were taken out.

“Okay! We’re done here so we’ll be off now!”

It seemed that the operators had reconnected all the wires and replaced the prizes and confirmed that all the machines were working the way they should.

—This whole process took less than ten minutes.

It seemed that the other machines destroyed by the mysterious couple have also been replaced with brand new replacements in much the same way.

“...”

Although these were inexplicable circumstances, Origami had more important things to be concerned about right now. She stood silently in front of the crane game and stared at the countless panda Ronnies.

Unlike before, they were all positions so that it would be easy to capture them.

If that was the case...

Origami’s eyes shone brightly but quietly as she stacked 5 100 yen coins next to the buttons.

“...Did you want that one so badly?”

On their way home from the game center, Shido tried to talk to Tohka who was walking next to him as they made their way down the dark streets.

“Muu...”

Tohka suddenly stopped.

“Tohka...?”

Shido also stopped as he turned to face Tohka.

She lowered her head slightly and handed the panda Ronnie to Shido.

“Huh...?”

“Here. This is for you, so—no, it seems weird to say it like that. How do I say...”

Shido was confused by Tohka's vague way of speaking.

“What are you trying to say?”

Shido asked as she bit her lip anxiously but she strengthened her resolve and continued:

“...Please don't hate me.”

“W-What? You... what are you talking about?”

Shido frowned in deep confusion and then with an 'ah' of revelation, he remembered what happened before.

“Are you still worried about what happened before?”

“Muu... It's a little...”

Tohka was silent for a moment and then said:

“...Shido, do you remember when I quarreled with Origami Tobiichi?”

“Ah... I remember.”

Tohka, in that moment, looked like an upset child with her lips formed into a pout as she continued.

“...At that time, she said.”

“What did she say?”

When Shido asked, Tohka glanced up briefly as though trying to peak at Shido expression while stuttering, she continued:

“...Spirits, it is impossible for them to coexist with humans. And humans can't allow Spirits to destroy the world. So—”

After biting her lips in determination, she continued:

“Shido hates creatures like Spirits the most.”

“...Oh.”

Shido scratched his cheek.

She looked to be in distress. Although it would be inappropriate to say this out loud... but he thought that sort of thing was pretty weak.

It must have been this kind of thing that made Tokha feel scared.

...He briefly wondered if she actually wanted to take that picture even though she didn't want to but she was worried about being hated by Shido.

"...Now, Shido, is that actually the case? That Shido also hates me—"

"It's alright."

"...Really?"

Tohka looked at Shido uneasily.

"Really."

"Is it really true?"

"Really true."

"Is it really really true?"

"It's really really true."

Shido thought for a moment and then said:

"Plus, I don't think I would want to go on a date with someone I didn't like, something like that..."

"Oh...!"

After Shido finished speaking, Tohka's eyes widened.

"Ah... that's what I thought..."

Tohka's cheeks were flushed a faint pink and a gentle smile graced her lips.

Shido then returned the inverted color panda Ronnie to Tohka.

"So you hold on to this. It's rare to be able to catch it by yourself. Think of it as a memento for today, okay?"

"Umu, I will."

Tohka mumbled happily as she accepted the inverted panda Ronnie.

At that moment, he could hear Kotori's voice in his ear again.

[“—75 points. That’s good enough for a pass...”]

“...That’s good to hear.”

The following day.

While waiting for Shido to come to school, there was a group of girls with their arms and legs spread out dramatically, standing and exuding fierceness.

“The pervert is here.”

“Why don’t you just die already?”

“Oink like a pig!”

“W-What?”

Although Shido didn’t understand what was going on, he immediately froze on the spot, but when Tohka who was standing right behind him wore a troubled expression, they seemed to immediately understand the situation.

“Everyone! I already said that Shido didn’t do anything wrong.”

Tohka said to the other girls.

“It’s alright, Tohka, we will make sure that this perverted sexual beast won’t be able to gain a foothold in society.”

“You must have been so scared. Poor Tohka, let us avenge your chastity!”

“...That’s how it is. In order to understand the situation, you need to tell us in as much detail as possible about what happened yesterday. What did he do to you? Tell us, what did he do to you?”

Tohka shook her head vigorously in response to what the girls said.

“No! Although I don’t really understand what you are talking about, you are probably mistaken! Yesterday, Shido just took me to a place called a game center!”

“What...?”

Upon hearing what Tohka said, the girls suddenly froze.

Then their gazes glassed over as they remembered what was discussed yesterday—

“...Really? Itsuka-kun.”

“...Yeah. That’s right.”

“...”

The girls should have understood from the beginning but now that they knew the full situation—

“Ahhhhhh! Whoops! How could we think that Itsuka-kun could do that kind of thing.”

“I...I already tried to tell you from the beginning that this was all a misunderstanding.”

“In short, Tohka is really safe...”

When they finished speaking, there were relieved smiles on their faces.

“...Anyway, now the misunderstanding has been cleared up...”

Shido sighed helplessly as he took his seat and pulled out the textbook for the first lesson from his school bag.

—At that moment, something fell out of Shido’s school bag.

“Ah, something fell out, Itsuka-kun.”

“Ah, thanks—”

At that moment, Shido felt the blood in his veins freeze in an instant.

Because what fell out of the schoolbag was—

“—What...!”

The female student who’d picked up the picture gasped.

Honestly, her reaction was understanding because suddenly seeing Tohka’s nude photos, surely anyone would respond like that.

“Wait! This is just a misunderstanding!

“What kind of misunderstanding could this possibly be! Doing it right in the game center... forced nudity! Isn’t that even more perverted?!”

“N-No... This is—!”

“Don’t try to resist—!”

“A-Ah!”

Shido covered his face with hands as he ran out of the classroom.

“Ah! Shido! Where are you going!”

Tohka called from somewhere behind but he didn’t have a chance to glance over his shoulder because he knew that if he stopped for even a moment, there would be a cruel and unrelenting assault waiting for him.

“Ah! Why did I do such a stupid thing! Why didn’t I put it away when I had a chance! I’m an idiot—!”

Shido shouted as he ran down the corridor.

Then—

“Whoa!”

Halfway down the corridor, he could feel someone grab the neckline of his shirt and he’d almost fallen over.

“W-What’s going on?” He coughed.

For one wild moment, he thought that the girls managed to catch him—but that wasn’t the case. It was Tobiichi Origami who’d grabbed onto the collar of his shirt.

“Origami?”

“Take this.”

After letting go of Shido’s shirt, Origami pulled something out of her school bag and passed it over to Shido.

“Huh? Isn’t this...”

That was the panda Ronnie (red) cell phone charm of the dream panda.

“Take it.”

“Eh... I can’t do that.”

“Take it.”

“...Ah...”

“Take it.”

“...Alright. Thank you...”

Shido was overwhelmed by Origami’s oppressive momentum as he accepted the panda Ronnie from her.

Then Origami pulled out her cell phone with the normal colored panda Ronnnie from her school bag.

“We match.”

“Ah... Y-Yes...”

“...”

After Shido nodded, Origami put her cell phone away and made her way back to the classroom.

“W-What was that about...?”

Just as Shido slumped to the ground in the corridor with a blank look on his face, this time he heard hurried footsteps coming toward him. It seemed that Tohka had been chasing after Shido.

“Shido! Are you okay?”

“A-Ah...”

“It’s safe to go back. I explained everything to them—Eh?”

Halfway through her sentence, Tohka’s gaze drifted to Shido’s hand.

Of course, because in his hand was the panda Ronnie charm that Origami gave him just now.

“Oh!”

Tohka pulled the inverted color Panda Ronnie from her pocket.

“We match, Shido!”

“Y-Yeah...!”

Shido scratched his cheek as he answered.

Shido, Tohka, and even Origami somehow came out to have the same thing.



Origami Impossible

“Honestly, I am a pedophile.”

It was during a school holiday while sitting in a cafe at a street corner.

Shido Itsuka admitted this quietly.

“Every day, I go to the nearby elementary school to watch the elementary school girls when they’re doing their PE classes. Their pure, flawless, flat and underdeveloped bodies make my Sandalphon go wild. Elementary school girls are truly the best!”

“Are they?”

With regards to listening to Shido’s once-in-a-lifetime breaking news, the girl who was sitting across from him, Origami did not wear a disgusted expression but simply nodded slightly.

She had shoulder length hair and a slender figure. Her expressionless face was like that of a doll.

She suddenly glanced down, touching her chest unconsciously and then replied to Shido and said:

“I can do it.”

“What do you mean?!”

Shido couldn’t help but shout out before regaining his composure. It wouldn’t be any good if he started panicking now. He cleared his throat with a cough and then said:

“In fact, it’s not just that. I still have a serious Oedipus complex. Every morning, I still kiss my mother’s picture before I go to school.”

“Is that so?”

“...It’s true... in fact, I also have a sister complex and I often make Kotori sleep next to me.”

“Is that so?”

“Um...! I-I’m not faithful! Right now, I’ve got about ten girls!”

“...!”

Shido’s eyebrows twitched for the first time after he shouted that out albeit in a half-hearted way.

He thought he finally managed to get a reaction out of her. In that moment, Origami’s lips moved and she said without a change in tone:

“It’s not a problem so long as I get rid of all of them.”

“What are you saying! Oh, what are you saying?!”

Shido’s cries were almost as loud as shouts as he clutched his head.

Then, a stunned voice came from the earpiece he’d worn on his right ear:

[“...Wow, what’s with this unbearable force, has she become the overlord of the century?”]

Kotori, Shido’s little sister, spoke through the earpiece. Obviously, he could only hear her voice, but he had a strong feeling she looked just as frustrated as he felt.

“She still looks like this... T-Tell me what to do now...”

[“Stop whining. Now as for the next move...”]

After she finished speaking, she gave him additional instructions.

This surreal dating scene was caused by what happened the previous day.

During the lunch break one day:

In a classroom at Raizen High School, Tohka Yatogami happily showed off the cell phone held in her hand.

“Oh, what do you think, Shido! Kotori gave this to me! It seems to be something that I can use to talk to other people from far away!”

Her long dark hair fluttered in the air, a broad smile stretched across her beautiful face as Tohka raised the phone in her hand.

“O-Oh, that’s great to hear.”

Shido smiled kindly.

...Tohka held it almost reverently in her hand. It seemed to be a simple and old-fashioned model that was easy for even elderly people to use. Anyway, it seemed that she was genuinely happy about it so there was no reason to spoil her good mood.

That said, Shido and Kotori had spent a lot of time discussing all kinds of different models of cell phones. Although the appearance was just like any other phone, it could endure a ton of weight.

Also, even if the cell towers were destroyed in the event of a disaster, she would still be able to communicate via satellite.

...To be honest, such equipment was probably overkill for an ordinary high school girl to have.

But—this couldn't be helped.

The truth was that Tohka was not an ordinary human being, but instead an existence known as a Spirit. It was an existence who wielded extraordinary power and had the potential to destroy the world.

Although it was possible to seal away Spirit power—if her mental state becomes unstable, the sealed power will reverse and flow back into her. So Kotori, who was the commander of the organization <Ratatoskr>, was obviously worried about this.

Therefore, it was necessary to ensure that she had a way to contact them in the event of an emergency beforehand.

“Okay, Shido! I’m going to try it and see!”

However, Tohka turned away with a bright smile on her face that was such a stark contrast to that dangerous title.

“I’m going to call you from far away! Shido, you absolutely have to answer it!”

“Oh... so that’s what you’re doing. I got it.”

Shido smiled wryly as he nodded in agreement. He remembered when he’d gotten his cellphone, he wanted to try calling someone just like Tohka.

“Okay, I’m off!”

Tohka finished as she opened the classroom door and rushed down the hallway.

“Make sure you come back before the lunch break is over!”

“—I will—!”

Tohka’s faint response came from the other end of the corridor.

At that moment:

“—Shido.”

“Whoa!”

Someone called out to Shido from behind him and made his shoulders tremble.

Turning around, it was Origami Tobiiichi who’d appeared behind him silently.

...It seemed she showed up as soon as Tohka disappeared.

“Yes... did you need something? Origami...?”

“Do you have any plans for tomorrow?”

“Huh?”

Suddenly being asked about this sort of thing, Shido could only reply blankly... At the same time, he had a bad feeling about what was about to happen.

“W-Why so suddenly...”

“I want to go out with you.”

“T-That means...”

“A date.”

“...”

Shido’s suspicions were confirmed as he broke into a nervous sweat.

“...Origami, just so I can confirm, we are—”

“A couple.”

“...I thought so.”

Shido asked Origami nervously while Origami responded immediately without a trace of nervousness.

Sure enough she looked just as serious as ever.

Origami didn’t pay Shido’s nervousness any mind and continued calmly:

“How about it?”

“Ah... I’m sorry. I’m busy tomorrow—”

However, halfway through the sentence, Shido suddenly gasped.

He suddenly felt an oppressive pressure. If a weaker willed person faced this, there was no doubt that they might just pass out. This pressure was truly powerful.

“Ah, that... Ah, I’m sure that if anything comes up tomorrow, can you wait for me...?”

Origami nodded slightly.

Shido immediately panicked as he jogged down the corridor while scrolling to find and select the name “Kotori Itsuka” from his call history. Although he was still waiting for Tohka’s call... if Tohka called, he should be able to answer her regardless so it should be okay. After waiting on the tone of the phone ringing, a warm voice came from the other end:

[“Hello! Onii-chan?”]

“...Kotori, please help find a way out of this...”

[“Huh? What are you talking about?”]

“Origami asked me to go on a date with her.”

[“...”]

After Shido finished speaking, Kotori fell silent for a moment.

Next, Shido heard the sound of cloth shuffling from the speaker. It sounded like she was replacing the ribbons that tied her hair.

[“—This is ridiculous, are you seriously still involved with her?”]

In the next moment, her tone, now more confident and terse, was completely different from when she picked up.

—Kotori had shifted into her <Commander Mode>.

“...In the end, if it wasn’t for your <training>, this relationship...!”

That’s right. When Tohka first appeared, they’d had Shido do some special <Female Habitual Training> for Shido to get used to talking to women. In that process, they’d forced Shido to profess his love to Origami.

Unfortunately, because so much had happened between then and now, there hadn’t been an opportunity to resolve the misunderstanding—until now, that is.

[“This is a pain. Just ignore her.”]

“H-How could I do such a thing... Originally, it was our fault that all of this happened. How could we keep messing around with her like this!”

[“You want to be honest—then why don’t you just tell her that the whole confession was a misunderstanding?”]

“...How am I supposed to pull that off?”

[“Hmm? Then why don’t you spit on her and then say: ‘I’m not going to date someone like you! Don’t be mistaken! You’re a psychopath!’”]

“If I say that, I’ll definitely get shot!”

Shido couldn’t help but shout. There was no denying that if he said that kind of thing, he would be killed on the spot.

[“Since you’re so picky—Why don’t we make it so the other party hates you?”]

“Huh?”

[“Like I said, accept that date and in turn, I will adjust the AI settings on the <Fraxinus> to help you prepare options that will make the date terrible and make her want to break up with you. If the other party hates you, there’s no problem, right?”]

The so-called <Fraxinus> was the airship owned by <Ratatoskr>.

Normally, when a Spirit appears, the artificial intelligence aboard the ship will provide the options and choosing and following the prompts will help to improve the relationship with the Spirit.

“R-Really...”

It made sense. He would surely get slapped if he did something like that but he could handle that.

“...I get it. So I can count on you for support?”

[“Of course. Considering the future, it would also be troublesome if we have to deal with her all the time—but there’s still one last problem to deal with.”]

“What’s that?”

[“Tohka. We don’t have school tomorrow as it’s a Saturday, remember? If Tohka’s all by herself, she’ll come over to play. But if you’re not there, there’s no doubt that her emotional state will drop.”]

“Even if I’m not there...”

As soon Shido said so, Kotori responded to him with a dumbfounded sigh.

“W-What are you doing?”

[“Nope, anyway, in order to focus resolutely on this, you have to get Tohka do something else beforehand.]

“Something else... Ah...”

[“Right, it doesn’t matter what you want to ask her to do whether that means to buy things or anything else—just make sure to ask her to do something difficult so that it’ll take some more time for her to finish. In other words, it wouldn’t be strange for her not to be with Shido at that time.”]

“—Anyway, promise Tobiichi Origami a date.”

“Right... I got it.”

After Shido hung up the phone, he nervously returned to the classroom.

When he returned, he spotted Origami maintaining the same posture as ever, standing upright.

“How about it?”

“O-Oh... no problem...”

“...”

Origami remained silent but she made a gesture of victory with her fist without so much as a change in her expression...

“O-Origami...?”

“Tomorrow at 10:00 am, I will be waiting for you in front of the fountain in West Tenguu Park.”

Origami simply said this as she left.

He didn’t know why but he couldn’t help but watch her leave with a brisk pace.

“...”

Shido felt sweat trickle down his cheeks, he heard loud footsteps sound outside the classroom.

The classroom door suddenly opened and Tohka, who seemed to be running, appeared once more.

“Shido! This... How do I use this thing!”

It seemed that she didn’t know how to make a phone call, and so she’d asked Shido while wearing a troubled expression on her face.

However, at that moment, Tohka seemed to notice Shido's expression which seemed even more trouble than her own, so she tilted her head in confusion.

"Shido? Is there something wrong?"

"No! I'm fine..."

Shido cleared his throat as he took his seat.

"...Ah, Tohka."

"Muu? What's the matter?"

"I'm sorry for asking so suddenly... but tomorrow, do you think you could run some errands for me?"

After Shido finished speaking, Tohka's eyes seemed to light up.

"Oh! Okay! What do you need me to do?"

She seemed to be very happy for the opportunity to help Shido and leaned her body forward towards Shido's desk.

Feeling a twinge of nervousness, Shido looked away awkwardly.

The following day, after Shido asked Tohka to run some errands for him, he put the earpiece in his right ear, and made his way toward the destination for his date with Origami.

Incidentally, Shido was currently dressed in a loose t-shirt, frayed jeans, and toilet slippers and he couldn't bring himself to go.

Honestly, all of this was embarrassing to Shido... However, girls hated boys who didn't stay clean and looked sloppy. To start, using this method to make Origami hate him was the best bet.

["Shido, it's fine to walk more slowly."]

He could hear Kotori's voice from the earpiece on his right ear.

Kotori was currently on the bridge aboard the airship <Fraxinus> that was floating above Tenguu City.

It was currently 10:50 am. It had been 50 minutes since the appointed time.

["We have to be at least an hour late. Also, no matter what she says, you can't ever apologize."]

"Yeah..."

They were very thorough with the plan. But this all made sense: she would surely be angry if he was late. It might depend from person to person and it was possible that she'd already given up and gone home long before now.

He walked as slowly as he could and around 11:00 am, Shido finally reached their meeting place.

There, Origami could be seen standing with perfect posture.

“Ah...”

There were obviously plenty of benches nearby but the fact that Origami had been waiting this long for Shido and he couldn't help but feel a stab of guilt for her. However, he couldn't afford to show such a reaction. Because Shido had to play the role of a terrible person who hated Origami for today.

[Right, are you mentally prepared?"]

“I-I am...”

[“Very good—Now let's get started. The first task is the first contact.”]

Kotori snapped her fingers.

Shido gently slapped his cheeks and continued making his way toward Origami slowly.

At that moment, Origami noticed Shido approaching and turned to face him.

Then...

“—Thank goodness...”

As soon as she spotted Shido, she spoke gently.

“Huh...?”

“I was worried something terrible happened to you...”

“...Eh!”

Shido had clearly messed up here. Not only did Origami not complain about his tardiness, but she seemed more concerned about Shido's safety.

[“What do you think you're doing, Shido? If you start feeling guilty because this, how are you going end this?”]

“A-Ah... you're right...”

Shido nodded slightly as he mumbled and then Origami gestured to her outfit.

“What do you think?”

“Huh?”

“Today’s outfit.”

As he heard her ask this question, Shido took a closer look at Origami’s outfit.

She wore a shirt that not only looked nice but felt comfortable to touch, a pleated skirt, a sparkling necklace around her neck. Her outfit was a stark contrast to Shido’s less than impressive outfit.

“O-Oh, it’s perfect for—”

[“Hey! Why are you praising her so naturally?”]

“...!”

After hearing Kotori calling him out on his behavior, Shido quickly shut his mouth.

He cleared his throat and shook his head slightly and spoke again:

“No... Well... It doesn’t suit you at all...!”

“...”

Origami glanced down at her outfit silently. While there was no change in her expression, Shido had the impression that she seemed a little disappointed and lonely.

Origami looked into Shido’s eyes once more.

“What kind of outfit do you think would be best?”

“Huh...? T-That...”

The moment Shido made to answer, Kotori intervened in from his right ear and said:

[“—Wait a minute! Now’s our chance. Deal a heavy blow to her!”]

Kotori finished speaking, she let out a breath with her nose.

Aboard the <Fraxinus>, Origami’s figure was now front and center on the main screen on the bridge.

There were various values displayed next to her image and a text window placed below her just like something out of a dating sim.

At that moment, three options appeared on screen:

- (1) A tiny bikini with a maid apron.
- (2) A sailor suit shirt and triangular sweatpants on the legs
- (3) A school swimsuit with dog ears and tail.

“Wow, these are really good choices.”

There was a chupa chups lollipop in Kotori’s mouth and the crimson military jacket draped over her shoulders as she sat in the commander’s seat. Her brows were furrowed as she looked at the main screen.

“—Everyone! Make your choices! Remember that we’re looking for the choice that is the most disgusting to the girl!”

After Kotori finished speaking, the small display in her hand immediately showed the final outcome.

Although the competition was fierce... it seemed that the majority had chosen (3).”

“Hmm... It looks like (3) is the most popular choice.”

After Kotori conveyed the option, Shido’s shoulders trembled slightly.

The options that Kotori proposed would make the other party doubt Shido’s tastes.

...However, he still had to answer. Shido gulped nervously and opened his trembling lips and said:

“...A-A school swimsuit with dog ears and tail.”

Shido gritted his teeth and shut his eyes tightly as he tensed his body as he finished speaking.

...Of course, he was bracing himself for any furiously slaps or punches she’d planned to throw.

However, what actually happened was different from what Shido was expecting. No matter how long he waited, he didn’t feel any pain from being attacked. He cautiously opened his eyes... It seemed that Origami’s figure had disappeared.

Maybe she’d gotten so angry that she’d decided to go home.

[“—Wow, that was much easier than I was expecting. Congratulations, Shido. Mission accomplished.”]

“Y-Yeah... thanks.”

Shido scratched his cheek while dealing with his conflicted emotions.

Anyway, this should have been fine. Origami no longer cared about someone like Shido—

At that moment, Shido was forced to stop thinking.

Because he spotted Origami running towards him from a distance.

—How did she manage to find those? Origami was now dressed in a school swimsuit complete with dog ears and tail.

“Wha...”

Shido and Kotori said in unison.

However, after Origami reached Shido, she tilted her head and asked casually:

“What do you think of this?”

After she spoke, she turned around in place.

The dark blue fabric covering her pale and slender body and the lovely dog ears and tail wobbled... It was equal parts cute and vulgar.

However, there was another issue that was of greater concern:

“Where did you get that outfit...”

“There’s a shop nearby that sells these kinds of outfits.”

Origami pointed vaguely in the direction of the nearby street... On that day, Shido discovered something new about Tenguu City that he desperately wished to forget.

“We should get going.”

Origami turned around and pointed toward the shopping district.

“Uh... that...”

Just as Shido was worried about whether it was really okay to wear such an outfit, Kotori’s voice sounded in his ears once more.

“...Why didn’t her favorability values fall with those kinds of words? This should have been simple!”

Kotori leaned back in her seat aboard <Fraxinus> and twirling the chupa chups stick as she spoke angrily.

“What should we do? Commander...”

“We’ll continue our attack! Come out with some truly awful choices that will make Tobiichi Origami recoil!”

After Kotori finished speaking, the next set of choices appeared on screen:

(1) “Hey! It’s too arrogant for you, a bitch, to be walking like a human. Get down in front of me!”

(2) “Ah! I’m so tired! I’m so tired of walking! Carry me!”

(3) “Ugh, seriously, can you stay away from me? You’re disgusting!”

“...Hehe, this is good. Each option is absolutely terrible. Everyone! Your choices!” Kotori’s personal device immediately showed the outcome results.

“The most popular choice is (1)—Ah.”

“Although these are all words and deeds that make people want to doubt human nature, there’s no denying that option (1) is particularly awful.”

The crew seated in the lower level of the bridge explained. Kotori nodded in agreement.

“It’s safe to say that if someone like Shido were to say such a thing, they would probably want to kill him.”

“...”

Somehow, the crew remained silent for a while but Kotori pulled the microphone toward as she spoke.

“What...”

He heard the instructions from Kotori and Shido wiped his face with a hand... the difficulty had just increased drastically.

[“Why are you hesitating? Don’t you want her to hate you and leave you? How can you not do this? Or what? Do you really think you can gracefully handle a relationship with her?”]

“Ugh...” Shido grumbled quietly. Kotori was right, of course. The whole point was to make Origami hate him and not try to protect her feelings.

Shido glanced at Origami who was walking next to him and slowly moved his trembling lips and said:

“...You... are a bitch... to be walking at the height of human beings... too arrogant. Get down on your knees...”

After Shido finished speaking, Origami trembled from her place beside him.

It seemed that this provoked her annoyance. Shido gently clenched his fists in triumph—yet...

“...”

Origami bent down onto her knees without a second thought and sat on the ground immediately.

“W-What...!”

[“W-What...!”]

The Itsuka siblings both watched this and let out surprised voices at the same time.

However, Origami tilted her head suspiciously as she looked up into Shido’s face.

“Aren’t you going?”

“No, uh, that...”

“While Shido was stammering incoherently, Origami nodded as though realizing something and stood up.

Then she wrapped her hands around Shido’s waist and began to loosen Shido’s belt with a snap.

“W-What are you doing, O-Origami! N-No... d-don’t, s-stop it—!”

Even as Shido let out a feminine-sounding shriek—Origami did not stop as she pulled the belt in one fluid motion from his jeans.

Then she wrapped it around her own neck and tightened it to serve as a makeshift collar and leash which she then handed the other end to Shido.

Then...

“Woof!”

She barked out.

The passers-by around them looked at them as though they were witnessing a surreal event.

“...What a pain. To think that they’d be doing such things in broad daylight...”

“Wow, to think that couples like that actually exist...”

“Uh, I feel like I should be recording this...”

“Hey Mom! Why is that Onee-san barking? Is she a dog?”

“D-Don’t look at them...!”

“...”

Shido’s face was now drenched in sweat. He could no longer stop himself as he bowed down and shouted, “I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean for you to actually do it!”



Meanwhile, in the middle of the shopping district.

“Alright, what’s next...?”

Tohka looked down at the notebook paper in her hand and sighed.

The groceries she’d bought so far were in the bag that Shido gave and was almost full to bursting. But as far as the first errand was concerned, so far it had been going smoothly.

“...Sata Andagi? What is that?”

The foreign words made Tohka frown. Although she didn’t know what it was, it sounded like it was very important.

—While Tohka looked around for something in search of something similar to this name while wandering down the shopping district, someone from behind her called out to her.

“Ah! Hey, wait a minute...! Could that lovely girl over there please chat with me?”

“Muu?”

Tohka turned around and spotted a man dressed in a gorgeous suit while sporting the flamboyant hairstyle she’d ever seen.

Loop

“...This is a pain to deal with...”

Kotori twirled the chupa chup in her hand and groaned while frowning.

It had been three hours since the date started.

No matter how poorly he spoke or how much he confessed to unusual habits, Origami Tobiichi’s favorability points haven’t dropped a single point... not only that, but occasionally, it seemed to rise.

On the main display, she could see that they were busy ordering drinks at a cafe counter. Origami’s expression hasn’t changed at all beyond the usual poker face she always sported. Incidentally, she’d changed back into her usual outfit.

“Rgh... let’s try another approach...”

At that moment, new options appeared on screen.

(1) Knead her chest suddenly.

(2) Spit in her face.

(3) Lift her skirt.

“If words won’t work, turn to action. Everyone, make your choice!”

Kotori’s display showed the results.

“The one that most people chose was—(3).”

“...Hmm, if you do this kind of thing with a large audience, I guess it might reduce her favorability a little bit?”

Kotori pulled the microphone toward her as she spoke.

“R-Really...”

Shido swallowed when he heard Kotori’s instructions from the earpiece.

[“Less talking, more action. If we don’t resort to something like this, there’s no way we’re going to be able to reduce her favorability.”]

“N-No...it’s not right...”

At that moment, Shido was hit from behind by another guest who’d been walking behind him. He’d lost his balance and fell forward.

“Whoa...!”

Although he tried his best to maintain his posture, there was nothing he could do. He landed on his face. He was almost certain he’d bruised his nose.

“That hurt...”

[“Well! You did it, Shido!”]

“Huh? What...?”

At that moment, Shido noticed that one of his hands was holding the light and familiar piece of fabric.

“...”

He suddenly had a bad feeling and slowly raised his head.

As a result, he saw Origami's slender legs and cute designed undergarments as well as a holster strapped to her right leg.

It seemed that Shido had accidentally ripped off Origami's skirt when he fell. Shido's face suddenly burst out into a nervous sweat.

"L-Listen to, Origami, this is..."

However, Origami spoke with the same calm as always:

"Do you want to do it here?"

"...! You... What did you just say...!"

Shido quickly fixed her skirt back into its original position.

Origami looked at Shido with disappointment before looking back at the counter again.

["...That didn't work either?"]

He could hear Kotori's increasingly frustrated voice in his ear.

"What... What are we supposed to do now?"

When Shido finished, he figured it was useless thinking that nothing would work. As he put a hand to his forehead and shook his head—He heard the sound of a beep coming from his right ear.

["—Eh, this really troublesome..."]

"W-What's wrong? Did something happen?"

["It's got nothing to do with Origami. ...It's Tohka. I've been watching Tohka as she's been shopping... It looks like a strange man is talking with her. I can't tell if it's a normal conversation or a solicitation, but I have a bad feeling that this man will cause problems."]

"Huh..."

Shido frowned.

Because Tohka was not very familiar with this world, there was no guarantee that she wouldn't be tricked into something safe by flowery rhetoric.

...But if Tohka got serious, there was no doubt that such a person would disappear in a flash. But it would be awful if things were to escalate to that point.

“We have to... think of a way...”

[“I know. It would be fine to send some agency personnel to her location... but I don’t want her to notice things related to <Ratatoskr>.”]

Kotori mumbled as she continued speaking:

[“—Shido, I’ll connect your earpiece to Tohka’s phone. Can you stop her and warn her not to do such dangerous things?”]

“M-Me?”

[“It would be quickest if Shido tells her. Now please.”]

“Wait!”

Before Shido could protest, Kotori’s voice was gone. Instead, he could hear the sound of a phone ringing instead.

After a few seconds of waiting, he could hear Tohka’s voice on the other end.

[“Hello?—Are you saying hello? Who?”]

“Tohka? It’s me, Shido.”

[“It’s Shido! Wow! ...So we can really talk like this...!”]

Tohka spoke excitedly.

“Tohka, what are you doing right now?”

“Muu... A man I don’t know started talking to me. He is telling me that he wants me to work for a high salary...”

“...”

Shido’s cheeks twitched in silence.

[“It seems that I can earn a lot of money by doing a simple service. He gave me a beautiful paper called a business. Can I go work there?”]

“N-No! Refuse him right away! Return that card back to him too!”

Shido couldn’t help but shout.

[“Muu... is that so. Since Shido said so, I’ll do it—Excuse me, mister, I will not do what you just asked.]

“Whew...”

That was really dangerous. Shido wiped the cold sweat trickling down from his forehead.

Then, at that moment, he spotted Origami standing in front of him with a tray holding two cups.

“Ah...”

“...”

Origami nodded without saying another word as she pushed her way through the crowd and returned to the counter again.

“I-Is something wrong...?”

“I want to return this.”

“Huh? Uh—you want to return this food...?”

The clerk, forced by Origami’s intense pressure, wore a troubled expression.

Because Shido was shouting loudly, Origami seemed to mistakenly think he’d been talking to her. Shido quickly called out to her.

“T-That’s not the problem!”

“...? Then is it alright?”

Origami turned his head and asked to confirm. Shido nodded and answered her and said, “It’s okay.”

However, at that moment—

[“What’s that? It doesn’t matter? —Hey, it seems like it’s okay. Give me that business card back!”]

Then he heard such such a voice in his right ear and Shido frantically shouted:

“N-No! You have to refuse him right away!”

[“Muu... I understand.”]

Tohka answered obediently.

“I know.”

—However, after Shido said that, even Origami nodded lightly, then slammed the tray on the counter, and then pulled out a 9-mm pistol from the holster under her skirt (Shido desperately hoped that it was just a model gun) and pointed it at the clerk.

“Obviously, you have to accept this return...”

“Huh...? Ah... Huh?”

The clerk was blindsided and the other guests around them looked scared. Shido quickly intervened to avoid starting a panic.

“No... stop! Don’t do that kind of thing!”

[“Muu... Is that so?”]

Then he heard Tohka’s voice in his ear.

Shido scratched his head and shouted loudly: “Ah Really! You two aren’t helping me out here!”

The time was 3:30 pm.

Tohka, who’d managed to buy everything on the list, decided to take a break on a park bench.

Because today was a day off, the shopping district was more lively than usual, but this park she’d found across the street was quiet and comfortable which would be the best place to take a break. Tohka finished off the beverage she’d bought with the pocket money Shido gave her in one gulp and let out a satisfied sigh.

Then her gaze fell to the shopping bag filled with groceries.

“Umu... Shido will certainly praise me for this!”

Indeed, having completed her errand while also rejecting that man’s invitation at Shido’s request. Once he gets home, hopefully he would pat her on the head.

“Muu...”

At that moment, Tohka pulled out the list.

As far as the errand was concerned, there is one thing that she hadn’t bought yet.

That’s right, she just didn’t know what it was.

“Muu... what should I do...”

Tohka hugged herself and mumbled to herself as she thought about it. A few seconds later, she suddenly realized something.

“Oh! For something like this...”

Tohka spoke loudly as she whipped out her phone.

That’s right, if there was something she didn’t know, she could just ask Shido directly.

“Muu... Just now, Shido called me, so I need to look for... call history?”

Tohka placed the phone on the bench, then carefully pressed the buttons with her index fingers using both hands.

“Ugh...”

It was 3:30 in the afternoon. Shido leaned back against the chair in the cafe.

Of course, they weren’t in the same cafe as before, but a different one instead.

After Origami pulled a gun on the cashier, Shido quickly made a mad dash out of the shop with Origami and walked down the street for a while—finally, they found this cafe.

[“...Since things have reached this point, we’ll have to rely on this last resort.”]

He could hear Kotori sigh in his ear.

“...The last resort?”

[“Yes. Can you get away from her for a bit?”]

“...? Oh, sure...”

Shido mumbled that he needed to go to the bathroom to Origami and stood up from his seat and made his way to the bathroom.

“...So? What’s this last resort you said?”

Since they were already well away from other people, there was no need for them to be quiet. Shido asked Kotori normally.

[“I think you’ve probably already realized this... But it’s almost impossible to reduce her favorability. What a terrible monster, I really want to see what’s going on in her brain.”]

“...S-So that’s your impression.”

[“—So, try changing the approach once and see what happens. Simply just do what you’d normally do.”]

“You mean...?”

[“Shido, you really have to become Origami’s lover.”]

“E-Eh?”

Shido couldn’t help but shout.

[“Just listen to the whole suggestion through to the end. Which is to say, you break up with her after having dated her. Tell her: “I want to break up with you. I don’t like you anymore.” Like that.”]

“A-Ah...”

Shido’s cheeks were drenched in sweat as he moaned quietly.

He took a quick sip of water to moisten his throat and to deal with tension.

—However, after all, he still had to deal with this.

Although it was because of Kotori’s instructions to start, there was no denying that it was Shido’s fault that Origami believed that they were dating.

But forcing Origami to hate him was too selfish.

Shido liked Origami—he thought that she was a good friend and someone he respected from the bottom of his heart.

But—no, that’s why.

He felt that it was disrespectful to Origami to continue this relationship with an ambiguous state.

“...I know. That’s why it’s called breaking up, right?”

Shido took a deep breath to calm himself down and then slapped his cheeks several times.

...However, he could hear his heart thumping, his fingers trembling, and he could feel even more sweat on his face.

[“Just relax... Though I know it’s useless even if I say that. At least, at the critical moment, don’t mess up.”]

“Ah... yeah... it’s just that... it’s probably for the best.”

[“Are you going to screw it up right now?”]

“Hmm...”

Shido scratched his head uncertainly and coughed to clear his throat.

[“Really... it was for the best to keep you away from her. Practice what you want to say now before you return to your seat.”]

“O-Okay...”

“—I want to break up. I... I don’t like you anymore. I want to break up. I... I don’t like you anymore.”

[“What are you talking about... Are you serious?”]

[“—Yes, I want to end our relationship.”]

[“T-This kind of thing, I don’t want it!”]

[“Please forgive me. I no longer have feelings for you...”]

[“You... Do you hate me...?”]

“Yes, I hate you.”

Then—

Shido suddenly felt that something was off and tilted his head in confusion.

Why did he have the feeling that he was responding to someone very smoothly?

“Shi...do...”

At that moment, Shido finally realized that the sound from his right ear was definitely not Kotori.

There was no way he could mistake that familiar voice—it was Tohka!

[“WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!”]

“F-For goodness sake...what happened to Tohka...!”

It seemed that as Tohka was crying, Kotori’s voice suddenly cut in:

[“—You idiot! Why didn’t you disconnect the line first?!”]

[“S-Sorry...!”]

He could hear the voice of one of the male crew members aboard the <Fraxinus>.

However, before Shido could figure out what had happened, a loud explosion could be heard in the distance and the building began to shake. The walls creaked loudly and pieces of building material fell from the ceiling.

“What...! T-This is—!”

For one wild moment, he thought it was an earthquake, but... it wasn’t that...

The shock was like a bomb exploding somewhere.

[“It’s Tohka! It looks like her mental state has drastically decreased! Her Spirit powers are flowing back into her at an incredible rate!”]

“W-What did you say!”

[“Umm... it’s our fault. Because I forgot to close the line connecting you to Tohka, the moment Tohka called you, he was talking to her again!”]

As Kotori finished explaining loudly, there was a startling noise outside the shop.

He could hear screams everywhere coupled with the frantic footsteps of people running all over the place without knowing where to go.

“Then... W-What should I do?!”

[“The only thing that can be done now is to reassure Tohka! Tell her that you hadn’t meant any of what you just said!”]

“R-Right...!”

Shido quickly put his hand on the earpiece and shouted:

“Tohka! Can you hear me! Tohka!”

However, she didn’t seem to hear him or respond. There was another explosion and the store’s walls began to shake again.

[“I-It’s no good! Shido, you have to find Tohka immediately!”]

“But Origami...”

[“There’s no point worrying about her right now! Get moving! She’s at the park across the street from the shopping district!”]

“I-I got it...!”

Shido clenched his fists as he rushed out of the cafe.

It seemed that the streets were disturbed by the sudden event. He could hear screams and other such loud noises all around him and the pedestrians all seemed to be running in the same direction.

Almost immediately, Shido understood the reason why: because, from the direction where the park was located, he could see smoke rising continuously.

“Is...Is that...!”

Things were worse than he’d expected. In order to avoid the crowds, Shido rushed toward his destination as fast as he could via the alleyways.

Fortunately, the cafe where he and Origami were was not far from the park where Tohka had been taking a break.

...But considering the danger of running into Tohka by pure chance during their date, it wouldn’t have been very lucky.

“...!”

—At that moment, Shido felt his phone still in his pocket vibrating.

It could probably be from Tohka. He didn’t slow down as he pulled his phone out of his pocket to answer it.

However, instead of Tohka, it was Origami on the other end of the call.

[“—Shido, where are you?”]

‘Origami. I’m sorry. Just give me a little bit of time—’

Before he could finish speaking, he heard another explosion and rubble fell just in front of Shido.

“Whoa...”

Shido just barely managed to dodge the rubble and continued to run.

He mentally apologized to Origami for what he’d done but now was not the time to talk. He tossed the phone back into his pocket and picked up his running pace.

Then—

“Wha...”

Shido finally reached the park and stared with wide eyes.

In a corner of the large park, there was a large hole as though the result of a crater caused by a meteor.

It looked just like the spatial-quakes caused by the Spirits when they appeared in this world.

He could make out the figure of a girl squatting on the ground and her shoulders trembling from time to time.

“T-Tohka...!”

Shido shouted as he ran forward, stumbling across the uneven ground.

At that moment, Tohka finally noticed Shido’s presence. Her shoulders shook as she faced him timidly.

“S-Shido...”

She called out his name, her face wet with tears.

“...!”

Shido felt his throat squeeze tightly, making almost impossible to breath but nonetheless, he still shouted:

“W-What I said before, I didn’t mean any of it!”

“Huh...?”

After hearing what Shido said, Tohka’s expression turned to one of stunned surprise.

Then her gaze turned contemplative for a moment as she wiped her tears with her sleeve before facing Shido again.

“R-R-Really?”

Then she gazed carefully into Shido’s face as he replied.

“Yes... that’s right.”

“Y-You don’t hate me...?”

“W-What? Of course I don’t hate you! How could I ever hate you?!”

“R-Really! Then... so, we can still be together?”

“O-Of course!”

“Can we be together forever?”

“Ah... Yes, we’ll always be together!”

Although it was a little sloppy, he still promised her. But first things first, he had to help her calm down. Shido nodded while responding as loudly as he could.

Tohka sniffled as she stood up.

“R-Really...? U-Umu, that’s what I thought!”

Tohka seemed to be genuinely relieved from the bottom of her heart and showed the shopping that’d fallen aside (and for some reason was unharmed despite all the damage) to Shido.

“M-Muu...? I managed to do all of the shopping!”

“O-Oh! That’s amazing, Tohka!”

“Hee hee hee!”

After Shido finished speaking, Tohka smiled proudly.

But at that moment, he could hear Kotori’s voice in his ear once more:

[“Whew... Good job—Although, I really wish I could say that, you should probably get out of there first.”]

“Huh...?”

After hearing what Kotori said, Shido frowned... However, he immediately understood what she’d meant.

He could hear the sound of fire trucks and patrol cars nearby. If they stayed in that area, things would only become more troublesome.

“T-Tohka, let’s get out of here!”

“Muu...? Oh, I understand.”

After Shido finished speaking, Tohka nodded obediently.

“Whew...”

Long story short, it seemed that they managed to avert a full-blown crisis.

Shido left the park with Tohka and was finally relieved.

“What happened? Why are we going so fast?”

“It’s hard to explain.”

Shido explained while chuckling weakly to an uncertain Tohka.

But a few seconds later, Shido froze in place once again.

The reason why was obvious. He didn’t know when Tobiichi Origami appeared before Shido

“...”

“...! O-Origami...?”

“Muu...”

Shido could feel his whole body tremble at the sight of her while Tohka crossed herself unhappily. This was hardly a surprise considering that Tohka and Origami hated each other.

However, it seemed that Origami was doing her best not to let her disgust for Tohka show on her face.

Actually, it was more accurate to say that she only had eyes for Shido. While her expression remained the same, her gaze belied her undying passion that he’d never seen before.

“O-Origami...? Is there something wrong?”

Although Shido said this, he suddenly had a bad feeling much like the one he’d had before spread through his body.

Almost immediately, it seemed that his suspicions had been confirmed: he watched Origami move forward without so much as a change in her expression and reached out to embrace Shido tightly.

“W-What do you think you’re doing!”

Tohka rushed forward to break Origami’s grip.

However, as Tohka tried harder to break Origami’s grip on Shido, Origami’s embrace only tightened.

Then she spoke quietly:

“—Together forever...”

“W-What...!”

It seemed that Origami heard what Shido said as he frowned.

“Hey... let go of him! He said that to me! The person he’s going to be together with forever is me!”

“—That’s not possible. He clearly said that to me.”

Tohka finally managed to get Origami to let go of Shido as they continued to bicker.

Then, Shido had another bad feeling as he pulled his phone which he’d carelessly thrown in his pocket in his rush to get back to Tohka.

He glanced down at the screen... and immediately realized that he was still talking to Origami. It seemed that he’d never hung up when Origami called him.

Yoshino Fireworks

One night in summer, Shido Itsuka was in the kitchen preparing dinner as usual.

“Shido, what’s for dinner tonight?”

A girl’s voice sounded out from the living room. Turning to look in that direction, he found the girl whose long hair was as dark as night as well as crystal-like eyes—Tohka was currently lying on top of a yoga ball and looking towards the kitchen. Although she lives in the apartment next door, she would occasionally enter the Itsuka residence to join them for lunch .

“Nn, it’s slightly hot today. I’ll make cold soba then.”

“Oooh!”

When Shido just finished his sentence, Tohka’s eyes started to sparkle. After putting all of her weight onto the yoga ball, she made use of its rebound to stand up.

“Are there any pink colored noodles in there?”

“There are, and there are green ones too.”

“Wh-what did you say...”

Tohka showed an expression as though she was a clergy member who had received a message from the heavens, and her hands trembled. What an emotional person. Shido smiled bitterly as he continued.

“So, can you go and tidy up the table for me first?”

“Nn, nn! Leave it to me!”

Tohka enthusiastically replied, and hastily cleared the newspapers and magazines that covered the table. It looks like she had discovered something in the midst of cleaning up.

“Nn?”

Her hand stopped, and she made a curious sound.

“Hm? What’s the matter?”

“Umm, Shido, what is this?”

Saying that, she opened up a flyer. Printed on it was a picture of massive fireworks and related information of a fireworks festival being held nearby.

“It’s a fireworks festival. So the time has come for this, huh?”

“Fireworks?”

Tohka widened her eyes and tilted her head to one side. The same time as Tohka made that posture, the door to the living room opened suddenly, following that a petite figure walked in. Since the only one that would enter without pressing the doorbell, other than Tohka and his parents who are overseas working, was his little sister Kotori, Shido spoke while rhythmically chopping the onions.

“So you are finally back. Dinner is about to be ready so you should hurry up and change—”

Shido stopped speaking after he turned around. The girl who had walked into the room was different from whom Shido had expected. She seemed to be just over ten years old. A light colored one piece dress clothed her snow white skin, she hid her blue hair using the wide brim of a sun hat. An oddly designed rabbit puppet was worn on her hand.

“Yoshino?”

After Shido called out her name, Yoshino revealed her sapphire-like eyes from below her hat, as though trying to affirm Shido’s presence. Those were a pair of beautiful eyes that a human couldn’t possibly have. That’s right. She—along with Tohka, strictly speaking, are not humans. They are lifeforms known as “Spirits” that are specially designated calamities. Even so, their powers are currently being sealed, and as a result, they are not that dangerous anymore. In truth, Yoshino, who is under <Ratatoskr>’s protection, is currently living in the living quarters of the airship, learning the necessary information for her to successfully integrate into human society.

“Go-good evening... Shido-san, Tohka-san.”

“Aha— long time no see Shido-kun. How have you been doing? Have you constantly spent sleepless nights by yourself thinking about Yoshino?”

After Yoshino respectfully lowered her head, the puppet that was worn on her left hand—[Yoshinon] opened its mouth and gave out a cheerful voice. Due to the difference in their tone and personalities, Shido couldn’t help but smile bitterly. Although it looks like ventriloquism, strictly speaking, that is not the case. [Yoshinon] is a second personality that resides within Yoshino, but she does not control what it says; at present, Yoshino was covering [Yoshinon]’s mouth with a reddened face.

“I’m... I’m sorry...”

“Mm—! Mm—!”

Yoshino felt apologetic as she lowered her head once more. [Yoshino], on the other hand, was struggling to break free. It was adorable to see them like that, and Shido couldn't help laughing.

"It's alright... Do you need something, Yoshino?"

Shido questioned, Yoshino on the other hand jumped slightly.

"A-about... that is..."

Yoshino seemed to be hesitant in speaking out, letting her eyes wander around, however she seemed to have come to a conclusion as she parted her lips.

"Y-you are still a... coward I see, Shido... You should be feeling honored instead... Look at you, such a penniless, classless, useless nerd... I will grant you... your reason for existing. Tomorrow night... take me... to the fireworks festival. Such a task... even a flea like you who has evolved to a level nearing that of humanity... should be able to accomplish, right...?"

Yoshino stuttered, saying words that she'd normally never say.

"Wh... wh-what's the matter, Yoshino?"

Tohka frowned in confusion as well, drops of sweat trickled down her cheek. However Shido had a different reaction. After the side of his face twitched, he slowly raised his head.

"...Hey, you rascal."

"...! S-sorry, sorry, sorry...! B, but..."

Yoshino bowed her head to indicate her apology from the bottom of her heart. But Shido was not blaming Yoshino at all. He only threw a sharp glance behind her—glaring at the door that Yoshino had opened before. As expected, Kotori, who was shaking from trying to control her laughter, was standing there observing the turn of events.

"Kotori! What are you trying to add into the oasis in my heart!"

"...So you are trying to say that you want to go see the fireworks festival?"

After getting Kotori out from peeping behind the door, Shido spoke while sighing. He was told that Yoshino wanted to see the Fireworks that she read in books with her own eyes very much.

—She wanted to take the chance and use her Dating Right with Shido, consulting Kotori about the matter.

"That's right. I remember that there's a fireworks festival at Tenbagawa tomorrow? You should bring her there."

The girl whose long hair was tied up using black ribbons—Kotori spoke while sitting on the sofa with a haughty attitude. Explaining the so-called “Dating Right”, it is referring to the right of possessing Shido for an entire day, Yoshino obtained it from a certain competition. Of course Shido’s protests were left unheeded... But more importantly it was because the situation could potentially escalate if the right was handed to anyone other than Yoshino from his protests, so there was no other choice other than to silently agree.

“If that was the case then can’t you just let her say it out normally. What were you trying to make Yoshino do?”

“Well, if we didn’t put it like that, it would be useless against Shido who is as dense as a block of wood... So what is your reply?”

“I’m not really against it or anything...”

Shido glanced at Tohka who was sitting by the side. Since she was the person that was most interested in this activity. After hearing Kotori talk about the fireworks festival, her cheeks faintly blushed, the two balled up fists were trembling as well. ... In other words, she was controlling herself.

“Ha...!”

At that moment, it seems like she noticed Shido’s stare, Tohka’s shoulders gave a jolt.

“Is-isn’t that gr-great? Such a rare chance... The two of you should enjoy yourselves to the fullest.”

Although Tohka said that. Tears could clearly be seen from the corner of her eyes, it was obvious that she was forcing herself. Sweat formed on Shido’s face, turning to look at Yoshino. Yoshino too was making a similar expression as well.

“Umm... Tohka-san, if you are willing... do you want to come with us?”

“! Re-really?!” After Yoshino said that, Tohka couldn’t help but stand up—but she quickly shook her head forcefully as though trying to persuade herself.

“No... I can’t. This date belongs to the winner Yoshino. If I were to join you, then it wouldn’t be right.”

Tohka twirled her fingers as she spoke. Looking at her miserable state, Kotori couldn’t help but shrug.

“Alright alright, we’ll let Reine bring Tohka there. There’s no problem as long as you two move separately right?”

As Kotori finished speaking, Tohka's expression brightened in an instant.

"! Uu... Well, if you all want me to go that badly, then I guess there's no helping it!"

Looking at Tohka, Shido and Yoshino looked at each other and smiled bitterly.

The next day, Shido waited for Yoshino near the statue whose form is still up to one's imagination to find out at the nearest station from the fireworks festival. The time as of now was not 6pm yet. There's still about an hour till the fireworks festival starts, however the figures of tourists have already filled the exterior of the station. Among them were tourists with the intention of touring the game stations, there were a number of people carrying packages of takoyaki or yo-yo balls who entered the station.

"Although I've already expected this... there sure are a lot of people here."

"What are you still hanging around for? We've just sent Yoshino over, she should be heading there soon, the two of you better meet up successfully okay?"

As though replying to Shido's monologue, Kotori's voice sounded into his right ear. Although Yoshino's mental state has stabilized, he still put on the earphone on <Ratatoskr>'s request just in case.

"—According to the rules, we will not be giving you any instructions today, but there are <Ratatoskr>'s crew members on site as well. So feel free to ask if anything comes up."

"I understand."

"Well then, we'll leave Yoshino to you."

Saying that, the conversation with Kotori ended. After affirming this fact, Shido started to look around in order to search for Yoshino. And then.

"I've, I've made you... wait." "Ooh—, we've made you wait Shido-kun."

A familiar voice sounded out from somewhere near him, Shido turned his gaze downwards.

"...!"

Shido involuntarily widened his eyes due to seeing a scene that had totally exceeded his expectations. Yoshino was not wearing the usual one piece dress, but a pale blue kimono. She did not wear her sunhat as well, in its place she used hair clasps to hold her beautiful hair in place. All of that complemented Yoshino's doll-like features, exuding an incomparable beauty. Shido was instantly rendered speechless, staring at her figure.

“Shido... san?”

“! Ah, sorry about that.”

Brought back to reality after hearing Yoshino’s hesitant voice, he looked around as an excuse for his behavior just now. However Yoshinon who has the same hair clasps as Yoshino started to snicker.

“Ayaya—? Don’t tell me you were in a trance over Yoshino’s kimono? Ah—, isn’t that great Yoshino. It wasn’t a waste in getting Reine to help out.”

“Gu...”

“Yo-Yoshinon...! You, you shouldn’t say such things. Shido-san, wo-wouldn’t...”

Yoshino hastily held Yoshinon’s mouth, turning to look at Shido.

“Well... I do think that you are beautiful.”

Yoshino’s face instantly flushed red.

“Th-that, that is...”

Probably not expecting to really be praised by Shido, Yoshino waved her right hand about in a panic, making attempts of hiding her own expression with the brim of her hat. However what Yoshino has on her head at present was not the sunhat but hair clips shaped like flowers.

Yoshino used her hand to cover her face before removing them and repeated the process a few times, before lowering her head in confusion as to what expression she should make. The two of them silently faced each other with reddened faces, and although it was the perfect moment to interrupt, Yoshinon chose to just stay there with a sly grin.

“We, we, we, well then... let’s not just stand here, shall we go?”

“!Y-yes...! Then I’ll be in... your care.”

After Shido spoke, Yoshino respectfully bowed her head showing an extremely panicked expression.

“Nn, let’s walk this way.”

Saying that, he started to walk in the direction of the river, however Yoshinon’s voice called out to him.

“Oi oi Shido-kun. There’s so many people here and you’re just going to walk along ahead?”

“Eh?”

After turning around to look, he finally realized what was going on. Not only was the current Yoshino wearing a kimono, she was also wearing clogs that she was not used to wearing.

“You’re right, I’m sorry. Since we still have time, let’s walk over slowly.”

“Tsk tsk tsk. That’s not the problem, Shido-kun.”

“Eh?”

“Hurry up, Yoshino.”

Saying that, Yoshino lightly hugged Yoshino’s reddened cheeks. Yoshino grit her teeth as she still had a look of panic on her face, making a sound after her determination was set.

“U, um, Shido-san.”

“What is it?”

“I... Today, I used the right to date... with Shido-san.”

“Nn, that’s right.”

“So... Today is, the.. the date that I have with Shido-san...”

“Well, that is the case.”

“That, so, about that... it’s okay if you refuse... if you don’t want to.”

Yoshino timidly extended her right hand.

“Ca-can... you please hold my hand?”

Saying that, she looked at Shido’s face. It seems that Yoshino had made an extremely large resolution when she said that, the corner of her eyes were slightly wet, her lips were trembling as well.

“Oh. Of course we can.”

Shido, who was moved for a moment, after putting on a calm, nonchalant expression, he took Yoshino’s small hand. Possibly frightened by the sudden touch, Yoshino’s shoulders gave a jolt.

“! I’m sorry, did I scare you?”

“N-no... I’m alright.”

“I-is that so. Well then—let’s go.”

“Alright...”

Yoshino hid her stunned expression as she deeply nodded her head. On the other hand, Yoshino was saying,

“You did great. That’s a good girl.” As it stroked her head. Although it wasn’t the first time he had held a girl’s hand... But he was feeling exceptionally nervous for some reason. At that moment—

“...?!”

Suddenly feeling that they were being watched from somewhere, Shido turned his head and looked at his surroundings.

“Shido-san...? Is... something wrong?”

“Nothing... I think I was just being paranoid.”

It could be due to the fact that he was holding hands with such a beautiful girl, he had drawn the jealous gaze of a passer-by. After taking a deep breath, Shido gently held the fingers that felt as though they would break under the slightest pressure, slowly moving forward.

After following the flow of the crowd for fifteen minutes, they could see the various lights of the stalls on both sides of the path. Yakisoba, takoyaki, cotton candy and various food stuff that one would usually find at the stalls aside, there were stalls displaying water balloons, goldfish scooping, shooting galleries, mini-sized sculptures and prizes from lotteries. Although there wasn’t much difference between the stalls, business was booming.

“Waah...”

Yoshino widened her eyes, exclaiming in wonder.

“It’s really... amazing.” “It sure is rowdy here—.Then again, what is this place for? Can we buy fireworks here? And can we light one and let it go?”

Yoshino tilted its head in confusion, Shido on the other hand could only smile wryly in response. If everyone here lit a large firework on their own, that would definitely be an amazing scene.

“That’s not correct, they’re going to light the fireworks on the other side of the river. They only sell food and toys here.” “Eh? What’s that got to do with a fireworks festival?”

“Uuh... I, I don’t know myself...” “Hn—. Looks like there seems to be some difficult philosophical question of life hidden within all this—”

Yoshinon seemed to have understood something as it kept nodding with folded arms. Shido’s face showed a cramped smile, turning to look at Yoshino.

“Is this Yoshino’s first time seeing these stalls as well?”

After Shido inquired, Yoshino nodded her head rather excitedly.

“I’ve seen them in books before... but this is the first time that I saw the real thing.”

“Is that so?”

She had such a happy expression on her face, it was worth bringing her to watch the festival after all. Shido smiled as he checked the time on his handphone.

“There’s still some time till they let off the fireworks, let’s walk around.”

“! Can... I?”

“Of course, this is also part of the fireworks festival. Do you have anything you’d like to eat or have? Let me treat you.”

“Th-then I’ll...”

Yoshino looked around, frantically glancing at the stalls around her.

“Ahaha... I’m sorry. Let’s just look and see first. ”

“Ah, al-alright. I’m really sorry...”

Yoshino nodded her head, tightly holding onto Shido’s hand. Weaving through the crowd, Yoshino suddenly stopped.

“Nn? What’s the matter Yoshino?”

“Shido-san... What is that?”

Saying that, he turned to the left. ‘...’ And then, Shido froze wordlessly in place. In that direction a shooting gallery was located. There were ten guns that fired corks displayed, inside the gallery there were several targets placed there. There would not be a problem if that was the only thing they saw. It’s a shooting gallery that is not much different from the others. However that would only be the case if the shooting target was not a half naked man wearing a mask that looked eerily familiar.

“Aaah... Hurry! Someone hurry up and shoot me!”

“Keep your mouth shut, Kannazuki. It’s your disgusting fault that everyone is keeping away from here. If you really want someone to blast you to pieces that much then shut your mouth and wait there. Or don’t tell me you are unable to accomplish that? It seems that replacing you with a doll as a target would be the better choice huh?”

The owner of the stall sternly chided. Isn’t the owner a little too young to be manning a stall... Upon a closer look, isn’t that just Kotori in a disguise?

“Ku-Kuuuuu, but this is really making me impatient...!”

The man let out a frustrated sound while still tied onto the rack. ... No matter how you look at it, he was <Ratatoskr>’s vice-commander as well as the vice- captain of the aircraft vessel <Fraxinus>—Kyohei Kannazuki. The surrounding people kept their distance, every stall was doing well except for this one. Shido grabbed his head. Although he had already heard that someone from the organisation had already infiltrated, however...

“Why is it like this?!”

“...?!”

Frightened by Shido’s sudden cry, Yoshino jumped for an instant.

“Ah, so, sorry about that.”

“It’s nothing... , but, that... Shido-san, what is that?”

“Yoshino, let’s go to another stall.”

“Eh, but...”

Shido forced Yoshino to leave with him without saying another word. It wasn’t just because he did not want to let Yoshino continue watching that scene... but it would be disastrous if Yoshino were to be tainted from their bad influence. At that moment, Yoshino seemed to have discovered another object that had caught her curiosity. She stopped walking and asked Shido.

“Um, then, Shido-san, what is... that?”

“Hm?”

What Yoshino had seen was the stall that sold crushed ice. Countless glittering ice fragments flew out of the massive machine.

“It’s beautiful...”

“Yeah, that’s crushed ice. A block of ice is shaved into small pieces before eating with syrup added to it.”

“Is it food?”

Yoshino widened her eyes with surprise. Ahh, if one were to look at it without prior knowledge, it would be simply too beautiful to call crushed ice food.

“That’s right, it’s good. Would you like to try it?”

“...!”

After Shido asked, Yoshino nodded her head in agreement.

“Then... what flavor would you like?”

Shido held Yoshino’s hand and walked to the store, asking her that question after looking at the board which had strawberry, melon and more flavours stated on it.

“I’ll leave it to you.”

“Eh? Then, I’ll get a...”

The same time Shido looked at the menu, he looked at the person manning the stall. ... Speaking of which, he seemed to have seen this man onboard <Fraxinus>, in the end Shido chose to ignore such issues. For all he knew, most of the stalls in the festival could be manned by the staff members of <Ratatoskr>. An overprotective and extravagant support mission as usual.

“Excuse me, one Blue Hawaii please.”

“Coming right up!”

The man used practiced movements to make a big mountain of ice in a cup, handing it over after colouring it with a layer of blue syrup. Shido did not order Blue Hawaii because it was recommended (it was more like, even Shido himself had no clue what exactly was this flavour), he only thought that the sparkling blue colour suited Yoshino extremely well. Shido took the cup after paying, passing it over to Yoshino.

“This is for you”

“Th-thank you very much...”

Yoshino asked [Yoshinon] to help hold the cup, using a plastic spoon to scoop the blue ice, after scrutinizing it for a while, she placed it into her mouth.

“—!!”

Her eyes widened in surprise, after looking left and right she looked up into Shido's face, patting his body with an excited expression. However her shoulders quickly gave a jolt, showing an expression that was full of apology.

“I'm sorry, I've been a little...”

“Haha, did you like it?”

As Shido asked, Yoshino vigorously nodded her head.

“It was cold, and sweet at the same time... But it was different from ice cream... amazing. This is a revolutionary taste...”

Saying that, Yoshino proceeded to eat the crushed ice with big scoops.

“Ah, hold on. If you eat it too quickly...”

“...Nn.”

Too late. Yoshino had a bitter expression on her face as she rubbed her forehead.

“There's a sharp pain in my head...”

“Eating chilled food too quickly will cause that. It's called brain freeze.”

“This headache has such a delicious name...”

Yoshino squeezed out her words while tightly closing her eyes. At the same time a sharp voice sounded out from within the crowd.

“—Oooh! Reine, I want to eat that next! What is that?!”

“...Regrettably, goldfish can't be eaten.”

“Hm, is that so? I thought they were to be eaten raw too...”

Voices that they have heard before. Shido, Yoshino as well as [Yoshinon] turned their heads at the same time.

“Eh, that was...”

“Tohka... san?”

[Seems like it—] That's right. Standing right there was Tohka in a kimono along with Reine who was taking her out to play while in a kimono as well. On a side note, Tohka's right hand was

holding a massive stick of cotton candy, in between the fingers on her left hand were a toffee apple, chocolate banana, dried squid and more foodstuff.

Furthermore both her wrists were wearing glowing bracelets and the side of her head had a hero's mask. One could say that it was a look that fully showed that she was enjoying this festival. Tohka's kimono was on par with Yoshino... However, due to her playful appearance, Shido couldn't help but laugh.

“Hey—, Tohka—”

Shido called out Tohka's name, Tohka on the other hand raised her eyebrows in surprise as she looked at Shido and company.

“Hm? Ohh... If it isn't Shido and Yoshino... huh—”

Tohka, who was about to wave to them, suddenly jolted, swiftly hiding herself behind Reine's back.

“...? Wh-what's wrong with her...”

“Hm—, I think Tohka-chan does not want to let Shido-kun see her in her current appearance?!”

“Gh... Who knows.”

It doesn't seem like Tohka would be the kind of person who would care about such details. Shido tilted his head in confusion, leading Yoshino over to Reine.

“Good evening, Reine-san. What's the matter with Tohka?”

“...About her huh,”

Reine shifted her body slightly, exposing Tohka who was hiding behind her. Tohka's shoulders jolted as she panicked, eating the cotton candy in her hand in a single bite, she used her free right hand to put the mask on.

“What are you doing, Tohka...”

“Ha, hahahaha! Tohka? Who's that? My name is Daizu Anpanman! I'm a superhero that gives all starving children in the world delicious soy bread to eat!”

What a confusing hero character indeed. Reine stroked Tohka's head as she spoke.

“...Well, I think she probably wants to avoid interrupting your date in her own way.”

“Ahh... So that's how it is.”

Shido and Yoshino looked at each other for a while, lightly nodding their heads. Although Shido and Yoshino did not mind, they couldn't very well let Tohka's good intentions go to waste.

"I see, then we'll make a move first. —We'll leave the peace of the earth to you then."

"Ah, Shido..."

Just as Shido was about to leave, Tohka made a sound as though she did not want him to leave.

"Hm?"

"! I, it's nothing! Leave it to me!"

"Haa... I was almost seen through. Luckily I bought a mask just now."

Tohka placed her hero's mask to one side, letting out a relieved breath. It was really dangerous just now. If Tohka didn't have a sudden stroke of inspiration, she would have interrupted Shido and Yoshino's date. Although Tohka wanted a date with Shido very much, watching fireworks together. However, she felt that she would like to wish Yoshino—who had splendidly beaten Tohka and Origami—well.

In addition, Tohka knew full well of the pain brought about when someone barges into someone's date. That's why she had made her decision; she would definitely not interrupt the date between Shido and Yoshino today.

"...Hmm?"

Just at this moment, Tohka suddenly frowned. The reason for that was simple. That's because a girl that she was acquainted with had appeared in the crowd. Using a pale purple sash to fix her white kimono, she was a girl with a slender figure. With hair that barely touched her shoulders, she had a face that was devoid of emotion. Isn't that—

"Tobiichi Origami...? W-why is she here?"

That's right. Tobiichi Origami was Tohka's and Shido's classmate as well as Tohka's natural enemy. Tohka narrowed her eyes in suspicion, noting that Origami was looking at the backs of Shido and Yoshino, increasing her pace as she intended to follow after them.

"! You, stop right there!" Tohka cried out, using her right hand to grab Origami's shoulder. If Tohka were to let Origami do as she likes, the date would definitely be ruined.

"..., Tohka Yatogami. Why are you here."

Origami turned around, glaring at Tohka unhappily.

“That’s my line! What are you trying to do!”

“That’s none of your business. Let go of me.”

“I’m not letting go of you! I’ll not let you ruin their date!”

Tohka yelled out, Origami’s eyebrow twitched.

“A date. So it was a date?”

“Yeah. So you shouldn’t interrupt them. Since you know that now then you should—don’t ignore me!”

Tohka noticed that her arm was pushed aside, she quickly ran in front of Origami.

“Move aside. I can’t bear to see Shido fall into the evil clutches of a Spirit.”

“Clutches? Yoshino is a nice girl. How can you—”

“You know nothing. A girl like her is the most terrifying of them all. Behind that obedient face of hers hides an extremely lewd nature. By acting innocent and weak, she triggers the male’s urge to protect her; she would then devour him once she manages to trick him to her side. She’s a woman that is as terrifying as those deep sea fish or rafflesia.”

“W-what nonsense are you saying? Yoshino would never do such things!”

“It’s useless trying to explain it to you. Move aside. If I were to let them escape into the darkness, Shido’s chastity would be in danger.”

Each time Origami tried to slip past Tohka’s side, she would be blocked by Tohka. The two of them were locked in a stalemate just like that, glaring at each other just like that.

“...Ladies. What would you two say if I propose that you two settle this with a match?”

Reine’s voice sounded out from behind.

“Hm?”

“...Murasame-sensei?”

Origami frowned in suspicion. However Reine paid no heed, she slowly pointed towards the stalls on the side. It looks like a shooting gallery. There was no sign of the owner anywhere, only a notice with the words [I’ll be right back. Do use it as you like. Owner] was present.

“...You two will use 30 bullets each, the one who has the higher point wins. The loser obeys the winner... How’s the rules? Is it clear enough?”

“Hm... Alright, I’ll take her on!”

It was easy to understand indeed, Tohka nodded her head in agreement.

“I don’t see the point at all. I don’t have time for this.”

However Origami did not seem to agree, she turned around and tried to leave. However, Tohka stood in her path once more.

“... You wish to get rid of this stalemate as soon as possible right? Tohka will obey you as long as you win the match. —Or are you saying that you don’t have the confidence to win against Tohka?”

Reine provoked Origami. After hearing that, Origami narrowed her eyes.

“What’s this, and I was wondering why you didn’t accept the match, so that’s how it was.”

Tohka nodded her head with an understanding expression, Origami on the other hand walked past Tohka, taking up the air rifle from the shooting gallery.

“Where’s the target?”

“Hm, why are you so full of energy now?”

Seeing Origami enter a battle state, Tohka ate the candy apple, chocolate banana and the squid that was in her left hand in a single mouthful. ... The smell of squid mixed with the sweet taste was not delicious at all. However she did not have the time to care about that. Leaving the trash to Reine, Tohka stood beside Origami and raised her weapon.

“It’s alright as long as I use this huh? Well then, let’s star—”

However after looking at the target inside the stall, Tohka froze. For some reason there was a half-nude male wearing a mask that was tied to the rack, several circles indicating targets were drawn on his body. On a side note, the place that had the highest points was the 100 points on his loincloth.

“T-this is...”

Cold sweat started to form on Tohka’s face, following that she noticed a petite figure within the stall.

“Hm?”

Peering further inwards due to curiosity. In the end she discovered Kotori who was in a kimono and hiding under a futon.

“Kotori...? What are you doing here?”

“! Aahh... Tohka. Um, I don’t really wish to see her right now...”

Saying that Kotori peeked at Origami who was currently aiming at the targets.

“Hm?”

Just as Tohka tilted her head in suspicion, Origami readied her rifle, calmly pressing down on the trigger with practiced hands.

“—Aha?!”

The cork flew out of the barrel and hit the loincloth directly. The target let out a pained but excited cry.

“...A 100 on the first try huh. —Hm, take something from the prizes worth 100 points then.”

“Can I really take it like that?”

“...Yeah, the owner of the stall and I go way back. I was asked to look after this stall just now.”

“Is that so?”

Saying that, Origami let out a sigh with a relaxed expression.

“Guu...”

Tohka frowned, returning to the stall after parting from Kotori. Imitating Origami, she readied her rifle and pressed the trigger. After letting out a [Pon!] sound, the bullet hit the target’s chest.

“Aha!”

“...Hm, the right nipple is—20 points huh. The prize is a fireworks set for children.”

Saying that, Reine entered the stall and took out a flat squared box that looked totally different from the [fireworks] that she had heard so much about. However, that was meaningless to Tohka right now. At present, she was feeling extremely frustrated at herself for getting a lower score than Origami Tobiichi.

“Uoh...”

Just as Tohka was grinding her teeth in frustration, the target let out another strange cry. It seems that Origami has scored 100 points once more.

“How... How can I lose!”

Tohka readied her rifle once more, pressing the trigger after aiming The time was 1850 hours. There was still light when they were at the station just now, but now it was completely dark. The cool air, faint sounds of insects as well as the starry night sky that one would never be able to see in the city, it could be said to be a wonderful place to be to watch fireworks.

There is still 10 more minutes till they start firing the fireworks. Shido and Yoshino walked around the stalls in order to find a good viewing spot, walking towards the river.

“Are you alright, Yoshino?”

Shido voiced out as he held Yoshino’s hand tightly. That’s right, that’s because the fireworks were about to be set off, the human density present in the location significantly increased. This situation is just like the huge sale in the new year or the morning rush hour.

“I’m, fi... ne”

[Aha, we-su-re-ar-e-be-ing-squ-ee-zed-here.]

Listening to Yoshino and [Yoshinon]’s voice, he followed the flow of the crowd to the wide riverbank.

“Aha... it sure is crowded here.”

“T-that’s right...”

[Oh my—. It’s the first time since Kotori-chan placed me in the washing machine that I’m feeling so messed up—]

Shido lightly stretched as though he was looking up at the sky. Due to the clouds blocking the moon, the sky was pitch black. It was an excellent day to set off the fireworks. He patted

Yoshino on the shoulder, pointing towards the riverbank.

“Look, they are going to set off the fireworks from there.”

“F-from over... there?” [Eh—, where—?]

Saying that, [Yoshinon] looked out.

“It’s right there. See, that—”

Saying that, Shido suddenly felt a sense of dread. —At the sleeve of her kimono, Yoshino’s left hand can be seen.

“Eh...?”

Shido rubbed his eyes, looking at Yoshino once more. But that wasn't his imagination.

“...? Is something the matter?”

[What's wrong—Ah, don't tell me you want to go to the washroom? How could you Shido-kun, you should have went before that—]

Yoshino raised her head, following her movements, her left hand went up too. That's right, the place where [Yoshinon] was supposed to be, yet there was no sign of the puppet at all. Shido widened his eyes. It probably got squeezed off just now with the crowd.

That being said, [Yoshinon] is not really the puppet that was doing the talking but the second personality within Yoshino. If Yoshino were to believe that she was still wearing the puppet, would she realize that the puppet had fallen off? However Yoshino followed Shido's gaze towards her own left hand—

“Ha...”

Yoshino started panicking, as though her throat had something stuck in it.

“...!...!”

Letting out a silent cry, she frantically looked around. However there was no sign of [Yoshinon] anywhere. Yoshino's face turned pale, tears started to form as she let out an expression of despair. That's correct, Yoshino was timid in nature as well as slightly anthropophobic. If she didn't have her best friend [Yoshinon] by her side, she would mentally break down from being overly stressed out.

If a Spirit's mental state were to be unstable— Suddenly, a warning sound went off inside Shido's ear. Kotori's voice followed soon after.

“Shido? Yoshino's mental state is becoming chaotic. What on earth is happening?!”

“Ah, aaah—Actually Yoshinon got—”

However there was no time for him to explain, Yoshino's sobs entered his other ear.

“Uu, ah, ah...”

“H-hold on! Calm down, Yoshino!”

“Uwaaaa, aa, aaaaaah...!”

Shido's cries did nothing to solve the problem, huge tears flowed out of Yoshino's eyes. And at the same time. —The place where the fireworks festival was to be held, a massive downpour started to fall.

"I'm very... sorry, Shido-san..."

Inside the shrine near the river, Yoshino faintly voiced out dejectedly. Her neatly tied hair was now drenched in rain, her soaked kimono tightly clung onto Yoshino's skin. Her snow white skin that could be vaguely seen through the kimono, made her seem extremely lascivious.

"You don't have to mind it!"

[That's right—, Yoshino didn't do anything wrong. It's Yoshinon's fault for being too playful. I've made you worry—, I'm really sorry.]

Saying that, the puppet on Yoshino's left hand stroked Yoshino's head. They were fortunate that, under the assistance of the staff members of <Ratatoskr>, they swiftly located [Yoshinon]. It fell to the ground just now due to the movement of the crowd, there were still footprints on its face but it's a good thing in itself that no further damage was found.

However, due to the rain just now, the fireworks festival had no choice but to be suspended. Yoshino was originally a Spirit that controlled water and chill. When her powers are present, as long as she appears, there will be rainfall. Although, with her powers sealed, she is now able to live a normal life—but so long as her mental state became unstable, the sealed powers would start to go back to her.

The result... would be like this. Due to the fact that [Yoshinon] was successfully found, the rain stopped, however it remains uncertain whether the fireworks would be set off. Yoshino felt extremely guilty due to the trouble she had caused everyone, her shoulders sank.

"I'm really... sorry..."

"I've already said, you don't have to mind."

Despite saying that, Yoshino still lowered her head in guilt. At that moment, [Yoshino] clapped its hands as though it just thought of something.

[Really now—. It's all ruined thanks to Yoshino—. You saw everyone's disappointed faces right—.]

"Ah, auuuu..."

"Hey, you don't have to—"

However [Yoshinon] ignored Shido and continued.

[Yoshino—, Kotori-chan taught you before, right? What should bad kids do?]

“Eh...?”

[Kids who do bad things must—?]

“That... be, be spanked...”

[That’s right. Spanking will cause you to reflect, so that you won’t make the same mistake in future—]

“Nn... nn.” After Yoshino replied, [Yoshinon] quickly turned its head. [So that’s how it is. Shido-kun, you will spank Yoshino!]

“Ha... Haa?!”

Shido couldn’t help but shout, frantically waving his hands in protest.

“No no no. Even though people often say that, no one would do it in reality right?”

[Eh—. But Kotori-chan would often spank Kannazuki when he makes mistakes right? She uses a whip too.]

That was easily imaginable. Shido’s face twitched, he supported his forehead with his hands.

[That’s why. Yoshino is the same. If we were to let her off so easily, she would make the same mistake over and over—. Is that okay with you—?]

“Well...”

Yoshino bit her lip, standing up and used her hands to support herself on a nearby pillar.

“I-I beg you. I... don’t want to let Yoshinon, and Shido-san feel troubled... anymore.”

Yoshino said with a panicked face, raising her behind.

“E-even if you two are right...”

[We’re going to stay like this if Shido doesn’t make a move—]

As Shido was hesitating, [Yoshinon] smirked and spoke. Yoshino nodded her head as though she had made her decision.

“Ugu...”

It has already led to this, Shido now has no way to reject them. Shido walked to Yoshino's back, raising his hand high.

[Ah—, wait a second.]

Just as Shido was about to lightly... swing his hand down, [Yoshinon] stopped him. Shido on the other hand let out a sigh of relief. Looks like [Yoshinon] did not really wish for him to spank her bottom, but it just wanted Yoshino to take the opportunity to be a bit more courageous.

However, Shido quickly realized how naïve his thinking had been.

[You—can't—. You have to spank her directly on her butt.]

Saying that, [Yoshinon] rolled up the corner of Yoshino's kimono, showing her behind to him. And for some reason Yoshino was not wearing any underwear underneath her kimono.

“Wh?!”

“...!”

Shido glared in outrage, Yoshino on the other hand was trembling as though she had a seizure.

“W-why aren't you wearing any underwear!”

“That's because... R-Reine-san said... that kimonos were supposed to be worn like this... Tohka-san too...”

“Tohka as well?!”

Despite Shido's yells, [Yoshino] did not pay attention at all, it started to make a rhythm by clapping.

[Come on, let the first one fly!]

“Shido... san. This position is embarrassing... so please hurry...”

“! Aaah... I don't care anymore!”

Shido apologized to the gods enshrined inside the shrine as he swung his hand down.

‘Pata!’

A clear sound echoed within the silent shrine.

“Kya...!”

[Another one!]

‘Pata!’

“Aah...!”

[The last one!]

‘Pata!’

“Aaah...!!”

After a total of three hits, Yoshino’s body trembled, she let out short rapid breaths. Although he did not use much strength, due to her skin being pale, there was an obvious change in colour.

“A-are you alright, Yoshino...”

“Y-yes...”

Yoshino weakly replied to Shido, hastily rearranging her kimono.

“About that... I’m really... thankful. I-I will pay attention in the future,”

“Oh, um...”

A mysterious sense of guilt assaulted him, Shido awkwardly replied while scratching his face. Looks like Yoshino had reflected fully on this. ... Well, even if she didn’t get spanked, I guess she would reflect on her mistake anyway.

However—if her feelings of disappointment have not yet disappeared... looks like it hasn’t. Her face still showed signs of regret.



Just as Shido was deep in thought, he suddenly let out a shout.

“Yoshino, Yoshinon. I’ll be back soon, can you wait for me here?”

“...? Alright, I understand...”

[Hm— Where are you going Shido-kun? Ah, don’t tell me you are really going to the toilet this time?]

“Well, I’ll leave it like that.”

Regarding [Yoshinon]’s question, Shido waved his hand and replied, lightly jogging to the location where all the stalls were at. Although there were still quite a number of people, a portion of the visitors left early due to the sudden downpour, the path became easier to walk. Shido looked left and right, looking for that specific item.

“Gah... so it isn’t here huh. Looks like I have to go to the nearby convenience store...”

Just as Shido was scratching the back of his head.

“Hey you! That was definitely cheating! You got to play by the rules!”

“I did not cheat. The rules did not state that we can only use a single rifle. Furthermore my current score is 10 times yours, there’s no need for me to cheat.”

“You, what did you say?!”

A familiar squabble came from the direction of the shooting gallery. Turning his head in that direction, he discovered Tohka and Origami were shooting at each other with air rifles. Their stomachs had targets on them.

Somehow, it was slightly different from what Shido knew about a shooting gallery.

“Tohka... and Origami. What are you two doing?”

“Hm?”

“—Shido.”

After Shido spoke, Tohka and Origami turned to face him at the same time. Tohka hastily attempted to use her mask to hide her face, but she quickly found out that Yoshino was not beside Shido, she tilted her head in wonder.

“Shido? Where’s Yoshino?”

“Aaah... She had something to do.”

Shido gave her a half-hearted response, moving his gaze elsewhere. He soon discovered the small mountain of candies and toys piled up at Tohka and Origami's feet.

"...What's all this?"

"Hm? Aah, this. These are all prizes from the gallery. Wonderful isn't it! There are no more prizes, so we had to settle this with a frontal battle."

"You only had a small part of the prize. Eighty percent of this belongs to me."

"W-what are you saying?!"

Saying that, the two of them entered battle once more (that being said, but they had to refill their ammunition each time they fired, so it was still considered peaceful).

Shido showed a bitter smile as he witnessed the scene—but he noticed something amongst the prizes that Tohka had won, so he called out to her.

"Um, Tohka."

"Nn? What is it?"

"I have a favour to ask of you..."

"What is the matter with him... Shido-san."

[Hm—, that's true—. It should be because of that right? Because he saw Yoshino who was drenched and couldn't control his desires anymore? He didn't have to go and settle it himself, cause Yoshino here is already ready—.]

"Y-Yoshinon..."

Hearing [Yoshinon]'s voice, she raised her head to the sky. At this point, the pitch black night sky entered her vision.

—If there were fireworks exploding across the sky right now, what a beautiful sight that would be.

"I wanted to... watch fireworks together with Shido-san..."

She looked to the stars and mumbled to herself. Footsteps came from in front of her as though responding to her words.

"Hey, Yoshino."

"! Shido-san..."

Yoshino's shoulders gave a small jolt, looking to her front.

"The words I said just now, did he hear them?"

she threw a questioning gaze to [Yoshino], it shrugged its shoulders as though saying [Who knows?].

"Sorry, I've kept you waiting."

"It's alright... but... where did you go?"

Yoshino asked in wonder, Shido smiled as he raised the object in his hand.

"Look at this."

"Fireworks set... for children. —Fireworks?"

Yoshino widened her eyes. That's right. The square box in Shido's hands did have those words written.

"Wait a while."

Saying that, Shido opened the plastic box, took out something similar to paper sticks, and passed one of them to Yoshino.

"This is..."

"Well, you'll know soon enough. ... Gah, I remember that I did place it somewhere around..."

Shido took out a lighter from his pocket, lighting up Yoshino's paper stick.

"Eh...?"

Yoshino, who did not have a clue as to what Shido was doing—quickly widened her eyes in surprise. The end where Shido lit the fire, started to shoot out golden fireworks with crackling sounds. It was different from what Yoshino read in books, it was a small light. However they were still fireworks nonetheless.

"It's so pretty..."

[Oh—, it sure is—]

"I know right? This is known as incense-stick fireworks. Well... they are incomparable to the ones in the sky though."

Haha, Shido said while laughing. Yoshino on the other hand vigorously shook her head.

“That’s... not true. This one is... beautiful.”

And then, from the front—in the direction from where Shido had come from, footsteps could be heard once more.

“Shido! Yoshino!”

The owner of the footsteps belonged to Tohka. She even forgot to disguise herself as she hastily ran over.

“Oh, Tohka. Thank you for your fireworks. Yoshino liked it very much.”

“That’s great. But, I got good news. It seems that they’re about to restart the firework performance!”

“Eh...?”

Just as Yoshino voiced out. A whistling sound echoed out from nowhere... as though it came from a whistle— Following that came an explosive sound, a massive flower bloomed in the sky.

“Oooh! It’s started! I’ve got to go. I’ve passed the message to you!”

Saying that, Tohka left in a panic. Looks like she really came to just pass the message.

“Haha... She really is busy.” Shido lightly smiled, turning to look at Yoshino.

“Isn’t that great, Yoshino. Well then, let’s walk to the river then. We’ll be able to view it much clearer from there.”

Saying that, Shido attempted to stand up. However, Yoshino shook her head.

“Here, it’s better.”

“Eh?”

Shido made a surprised expression. Yoshino continued to stare at the crackling incense-stick firework as she opened her mouth and spoke.

“I... prefer the fireworks over here.”

Saying that, Yoshino’s cheeks turned red. [Yoshino]’s face—slowly turned red too, but it was uncertain if it was due to the glow of the fireworks.

Kotori Birthday

“—Commander Itsuka! Happy birthday to you!”

A deafening sound echoed out the instant Itsuka Kotori entered <Fraxinus>’s bridge, party poppers were repeatedly fired off. A resounding applause followed, and a trolley cart that had cake loaded on it was also pushed in.

“...Seriously, you guys.”

Faced with such a heartwarming scene, Kotori lightly sighed. Twin ponytails tied with black ribbons, a young girl who wore an iconic crimson leather jacket. She is without a doubt the youngest person in the room, however her actions and speech hinted at the authority of a leader.

“What are you guys doing so early in the morning...”

As Kotori uttered that line, the crew members voiced their disapproval.

“Today is our commander’s fourteenth birthday! How can you continue to work on such an important day!”

“I heard that the commander is already holding a party at her house this evening, so we can only celebrate now!”

Although today is the third of August, which happens to be Kotori’s birthday... It somehow feels that they had gone slightly overboard.

“...Well, there’s nothing bad about it. Everyone just wants to wish you well; that’s all.”

Reine Murasame, who was standing on her left, spoke. Kotori could only reply

“Nn...” as she began to stutter.

“Of course, I did not say that we could not celebrate. That is, I... I don’t really dislike this.”

Looking at Kotori who replied with an unsteady gaze, the crew members began to get excited.

“It’s here! The commander’s dere expression!!”

“Thank the gods! Thank the gods!”



A tall man who was standing behind the crowd

—Kannazuki stepped out.

“Happy birthday to you, Commander. Being able to meet the commander in person on such a memorable day, I can’t feel thankful enough for this moment!”

Kannazuki made a movement as though he was trying to hold back his tears as he continued.

“As such, we have prepared a special gift for you this year!”

“...A special gift?”

As Kotori asked in surprise, the rest of the crew members hastily ran over to cover Kannazuki’s mouth.

“Why are you saying this out of the blue!”

“We still have to keep this a secret?!”

“Ah, that, that is true...”

Kotori glared at the crew with a gaze of suspicion.

“...What are you guys plotting?”

“Ah, that is... Hahaha.”

Just as the crew was intending to laugh it off, Reine raised her head as though she just thought of something.

“...Speaking of presents, Kotori, Shin seems like he still hasn’t decided on what to give you yet, you could ask him to get something that you want. Why don’t you try and ask him?”

Although it seems like she was saying that just to draw her attention away from the topic...

There’s not much meaning if she tried to get to the bottom of it right now. Kotori turned to face Reine. At the same time, Kotori heard the crew members heave sighs of relief.

“That sort of thing, I can’t think of anything if you ask me that all of a sudden.”

“...Then how about we change that to something that you want him to do for you?”

“Eh?”

Looking at Kotori’s suspicious face, Reine held up a finger.

“...For example, today you will be dere towards your onii-chan and the like?”

“W-why did it become that way! I don’t want to be dere towards him!”

“...”

“W-what is it?”

“...Nothing. Well, if you put it that way then we’ll leave it at that...”

Saying that, Reine turned back and sat down in her own seat, getting back to work. After momentarily staring at Reine’s back without a sound, Kotori clapped her hands.

“Alright alright, hurry up and get back to work.”

The crew members immediately returned to their workstations.

“Really now.”

Kotori sighed as she played with her fringe.

“...That kind of thing, how is it possible for me to say it...”

“Oh, oooh...! Shido! What is this moving thing called?”

Tohka Yatogami pointed at the display window in front of her, enthusiastically crying out. Night-colored long hair and a perfect face. She was a girl whose beauty was just as described. What she saw in front of her was a thin saucer-like automated cleaning machine that was currently in operation. It truly was moving around in a cute manner. However, Itsuka Shido merely sighed, after which he placed his hand on Tohka’s shoulder.

“Tohka, do you remember today’s mission?”

“Nn? Nn, of course I remember! It’s to buy something to celebrate Kotori’s birthday!”

Tohka nodded exaggeratedly. That’s right, Shido and Tohka at present were at the shopping mall located in front of Tenguu Train Station in order to search for Kotori’s birthday present.

“That’s correct, so you understand right? At the very least Kotori won’t be happy if that gets into her hands. Perhaps I would feel happier if I got that.”

“Then Shido should get it!”

“That’s not the point...”

“That...”

Just as Shido was in conversation with Tohka, a voice called out from his back. Turning around to look, standing right there was a small girl who was wearing a straw sunhat whose left hand had a rabbit puppet on. She was Yoshino, who tagged along in order to help Shido search for Kotori's birthday present.

"Shido-san, what do you think... of this?"

Saying that, Yoshino used her right hand and the hand that had the puppet on to pass a box for Shido to look at. Inside the box was an exquisite white tea set.

"Ohh... I see, I think that it's a great idea, Kotori likes to drink red tea after all."

Hearing Shido say that, Yoshino's face became red due to embarrassment.

"Oooh... I get it now, so that would be more suitable! Then I'll—"

Shido stopped Tohka who seemed like she had realized something and was about to run into the mall.

"You can't, she'll feel awkward if she receives a similar present from multiple people, right?"

"Uuh... is that so. Then, Shido, what do you want to give her?"

"Eh? I..."

Being questioned, Shido was rendered speechless. It was not because he had to keep it a secret till the party, it was also not something that is embarrassing to say when said out loud. It was simply because he still has not thought of what to get for her. It was not that Shido was clueless about what Kotori would want that would make her happy.

However, once he considered that it was a birthday that happens only once a year, it became hard for him to make a final decision... As a result, he is still unable to decide on a gift even on her birthday itself.

"Nn..."

Shido used his hand to support his chin, closing his eyes and tried to picture Kotori in his mind.

—After that,

"—Ah, now that you mention it..."

Shido opened his eyes, as though recalling something.

"...Where's Kotori?"

“She just returned home.”

Kannazuki swiftly replied to Reine’s question. At the same time, the crew members in the bridge showed battle-ready expressions, awaiting instructions at their own work stations. That’s right, the 3rd of August has just begun.

“Everyone, are you all ready?”

“Yes sir!”

At the same moment the crew members replied as one, the main screen at the bridge displayed the image of the Itsuka residence. Shido and the others were happily preparing for the party.

“Alright then, next up is the main point, let me reconfirm the battle plan. First of all—”

Kannazuki briefly ran through the plan for the final time. Just as Kannazuki had finished his explanation of the battle plan, He suddenly threw a suspicious look behind him.

“Nn?” “What’s the matter?”

“Was there someone over there just now?”

The crew members turned their heads around at Kannazuki’s words, but there was no one there.

“No one’s there. Are you thinking too much?”

Kannazuki scratched his head and tilted his head in confusion.

“...Uh.”

Reine turned to look at the door, using her hand to support her chin as she did so.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!”

A warm cheer resonated at the dining table of the Itsuka residence. The table was full of dishes that Shido made, with a huge strawberry cake in the center. 3rd August, Thursday.

It was Shido’s sister—Kotori Itsuka’s fourteenth birthday. Seated right inside was the person of the day Kotori. Seated on the two sides were Tohka, Yoshino, Shido and Reine.

“I already did say that it would have been better if you guys had kept it simple...”

Saying that, Kotori, who was seated at the birthday seat, slowly blushed crimson. It could be because Kotori was constantly fidgeting, but her two ponytails that were tied together with black ribbons seemed to be happily waving about.

“...Happy birthday. This has the best wishes of everyone onboard <Fraxinus> in it.”

Reine passed over a simple square box to Kotori.

“Thank you... So, this was the special present mentioned previously?”

“...Why don't you guess?”

Reine started to purposely avoid making eye contact, Kotori in turn stared at Reine's face with a suspicious expression. However, that expression was swiftly replaced with another expression.

“Kotori! Happy birthday!”

“Happy birthday, Kotori-san!”

[Congratulations!]

Tohka, Yoshino and [Yoshinon] passed their delicately wrapped presents to Kotori.

“T-thanks...”

Kotori turned her eyes away, seemingly embarrassed, but accepting the presents. Looking at Kotori acting this way, Shido's facial expression relaxed unconsciously. Kotori seemed to have noticed that fact as well, her face blushed an even deeper shade of red.

“Ahaha... sorry sorry. About that, happy birthday, Kotori.”

Saying that, Shido gave his present as well.

“...I guess I have to say thanks to you as well.”

“Don't mention it.”

“...Can I open them now?”

Kotori looked at everyone as she asked. Tohka, Yoshino and [Yoshinon] eagerly nodded their heads in agreement. However Reine stopped her.

“...Kotori, can you open my present after we all go back?”

“Eh? It's not like I can't, but...”

Kotori inclined her head to the side in confusion, placing Reine's present that was in her hands to one side. Seeing that, Shido raised his volume.

“Ah—If it is possible, can my present be opened when everyone goes home as well?”

“Shido, you too? I can... but the way the two of you are acting, have you planned something?”

“No, there’s no planning whatsoever...” Shido stuttered as he replied. How to say it, Shido somehow felt that it would be embarrassing if it were to be exposed in front of everyone. It was embarrassing to the point where he had to get Tohka and Yoshino to wait outside when he bought it.

“Uh... Well, it’s fine. Then I’ll open Tohka’s and Yoshino’s first.”

Tohka, on the other hand, excitedly leaned forward over the table.

“Hey Shido, can we start eating?!”

Tohka pointed to the dishes on the table, her eyes shining as though she couldn’t wait any longer.

“Nn... shouldn’t we wait until Kotori opens the presents?”

“Is that so? We should normally open presents first huh... sorry Kotori, I’ve been rude.”

After Shido gently reminded Tohka, Tohka immediately apologized to Kotori as though she had just realized something.

“It’s alright, let’s eat first.”

After Kotori waved her hands and said that line, Tohka’s expressions immediately brightened.

“Really?!”

“Of course.”

Kotori nodded her head in agreement. Tohka then turned to face Shido, and since the star of the day had already said there’s nothing he could do about it, Shido too nodded his head.

“Oooh, then I’m digging in!”

Tohka said it as such, happily putting her hands together with a

’Pa!’

Approximately three hours passed. Once everybody had tasted the delicious food, drank tea from the teaset that Yoshino and [Yoshino] had bought and played the board games that Tohka had given, it was finally time for Tohka to return to the building next door, and for Yoshino and Reine to go back to <Fraxinus>.

“Nn, then I’ll see you tomorrow, Shido.”

Tohka yawned with a “Haa”

“Alright, remember to bathe and brush your teeth.”

“Nn!”

Tohka nodded her head in agreement before wearing her shoes and opening the door.

“...Well then, we better be going now.”

“Good night...”

[Seeya!]

Following behind Tohka, Reine and the others slowly made their way to the foyer. As though replying to their words, Kotori waved to them.

“Nn, see you tomorrow.”

After that Tohka and the others waved their hands in return and closed the door with a

’Patan.’

Only when their footsteps faded from earshot did Shido stretch and relax.

“Well then, I guess I should hurry up and finish clearing things up.”

Saying that Shido returned to the living room and started to clear the remaining utensils left on the table. Kotori on the other hand seemed to be avoiding Shido’s line of sight as she sneaked to the corner where the sofa was and started to fiddle with something.

“Kotori? What are you doing?”

“! Don’t mind me!”

“...?”

Despite his confusion, Shido merely tilted his head and continued to clear the utensils. After a while Kotori stood up, walking towards the dining table in the living room. For reasons unknown, Kotori looked slightly different from before.

“Alright... Next up is...”

Kotori stood in front of the dining table, forcefully stuck her head out in an unnatural manner. And so at that moment, one of the black ribbons that Kotori used to tie her hair fell off and happened to land on the cutlery.

“Uwah!”

Kotori hastily fished her ribbon out.

“Ah, it’s dirty…”

“Oi, oi… here, let me see.”

Saying that Shido extended his hand towards Kotori. However, Kotori suddenly took a step backwards just as Shido’s hand was about to touch her.

“I’m going to change a ribbon since it can’t be helped.”

“Eh? About that, although you should change one, you should at least soak it in water first…”

“I’ll be back soon, wait for me!”

Kotori did not listen to Shido’s words till the end, running off to the corridor.

“Well… Since it was black anyway, the stain shouldn’t be that obvious.”

Saying that, Shido noticed something out of the ordinary just now. Now that he recalled when Kotori came over from the corner of the sofa her ribbon seemed to have already been loosened.

“It can’t be…”

Just as Shido was in deep thought, Kotori suddenly pushed open the door to the living room and came back.

“Oniichan!!”

—It was the highly expressive Kotori who had changed into white ribbons. From her expressions, Kotori became reasonably gentler, her speech became the same as that of how girls her age should be. If people who aren’t aware were to see this, they would probably think that she was (black ribbon) Kotori’s twin sister.

“Kotori…?”

He frowned whilst feeling that something was odd… but then he decided that it was unavoidable. Kotori only has that single pair of black ribbons. To Kotori, the act of [changing ribbons] had an even deeper meaning compared to changing clothes. When she wears white ribbons, she was the Kotori that was as sweet and innocent as her age group would imply. When she wore black ribbons, she was the Kotori that was the tough commander of <Fraxinus>. It was precisely because of these two distinct personalities, that Kotori was able to possess a [strong self] and undertake cruel missions.

“Alright, let’s clean up! Clean up!”

Kotori seemed to be happy as she rolled up her sleeves and brought the cutlery to the washbasin. For a second Shido was left in a daze, but that was quickly changed to that of a bitter smile. That was because ever since Shido started interacting with the Spirits, situations where Kotori was in commander mode has been increasing, so it was kind of refreshing for Shido to see the original Kotori.

“Onii-chan? What’s the matter?”

Kotori used a questioning glance to look at Shido. Shido on the other hand waved his hand from side to side in an attempt to cover it up and continued to walk to the washbasin. At this moment, Kotori seemed to have remembered something, looking towards the present which Reine had given her that was left on the chair.

“They did say that we should open it once everyone went back right? So it should be alright if I open it now?”

“Nn, open it then.”

When Shido said that, Kotori immediately used a refreshing American-style method to tear the wrapping open.

“What’s inside?”

“It... looks like a DVD of a movie.”

“A movie? Is it self-produced? Just like [A great leader and rare revolutionary—Comrade Kotori Itsuka and our footsteps] or something like that.”

“It can’t be! Although I’ve never seen it before, it looks like the kind that is commonly sold on the market.”

“Eh... That’s odd.”

Shido shrugged as he put on his apron. Thinking about the crew members of <Fraxinus> who loved Kotori so much, he was kind of expecting a unique present. Shido began to wash the dishes as he pondered. Following that, a low hum sounded from the television, it seems that Kotori had started watching that movie.

“Hey hey, you’re watching it now?”

“It’s alright, it’s alright, it will end in two hours or so. Presents are rarely given, it’s better to finish watching it today.”

“...Really now, be sure to bathe immediately after watching it.”

“I know!”

A single hand rose from the sofa. Shido went back to washing the dishes. However, a few minutes later.

“Waaaaaaaaa?!”

At the same time a loud sound was emitted from the television speakers, Kotori began crying out loudly as she escaped into the kitchen. For good measure, she hugged Shido’s waist and hid behind him.

“Waa! Wh, what’s with you...”

Shido lowered his gaze, looking at Kotori who was tightly grabbing onto the corner of Shido’s shirt, Shido felt his shoulder tremble from her shaking. Shido frowned as he looked towards the screen of the television—and soon found out the reason for this situation. Shown on the screen was a horde of terrifying zombies, it looked like it was a horror movie. It seems that he has become absent minded recently, he just remembered that Kotori was weak towards stuff involving horror.

“Really now, Reine-san... don’t tell me she has no idea that Kotori is terrified of such things...? Alright then, I’ll turn it off for you, so you can let go now.”

Shido said as he wiped his hands on the apron, however Kotori shook her head while trembling.

“N... No need. I want to finish it.”

“I say, aren’t you really afraid of these kinds of things? You don’t have to force yourself...”

“...This was selected by everyone for me, so I have to finish watching this.”

Saying that, Kotori raised her head. Judging from her expression, it looks like she does not wish to let down the <Fraxinus> crew.

“...Well then, um, all the best.”

“Nn...!”

Kotori vigorously nodded her head, walking towards the living room. ... For some unknown reason, she was still pulling on the edge of Shido’s clothing.

“I still have to wash the dishes...”

“...Uu...”

Kotori suddenly made an expression as though she was about to break down in tears, Shido sighed as though it can't be helped, took off the apron and walked towards the living room along with Kotori.

“...What's the situation?”

After sending Yoshino back to her room, Reine, who had returned to the bridge of <Fraxinus> questioned the crew with a low voice. “The commander has started to watch the movie. Furthermore it looks like we have succeeded in making her feel frightened.

“...But she is still watching it, correct?”

“That's right, there is no sign of her stopping, it seems that she intends to finish watching the movie.”

“After all, the commander did say that she would never do any rude acts such as carelessly handling presents...!”

“Nn... how wonderful, commander...!”

The crew wiped their eyes while being extremely touched.

“However, it was really a stroke of luck, we didn't expect her ribbon to be changed. It was as though it was destined!”

“...Just a coincidence, huh?”

“Is something the matter?”

“...It's nothing.”

After Reine returned to her seat, she looked at Kotori and Shido who were shown on the main screen.

“...Honestly, we should let Kotori do what she wants occasionally.”

Reine manipulated the controls as she said that, and a complicated route map was shown on the screen.

“...Two hours from now, we will start Phase Two of our battle plan. Make preparations.”

“Understood!”

The crew members replied to Reine's orders with raised voices. On a side note, looking at the vice-commander who was originally supposed to give the orders— Kannazuki.

“Ah, that expression is excellent, commander! But the S commander is also...!”

He was alone while immersed in his delusions. The two hours were... lacking in comfort. Due to the screen repeatedly showing monsters from the movie, coupled with the fact that a sudden telephone ring would cause Kotori to squeal aloud and grab Shido's sleeves tightly, or bury her face into his side. The movie finally ended with much effort, his sleeves seemed to have been stretched quite a fair bit.

“Haa... Haa...”

Kotori's eyes were red due to the circulation of blood, she rested her head onto Shido's shoulder. Through the bodily contact Shido was able to feel her rapid heartbeat as well as her damp body due to sweat.

“Look, it's already over. There's no need to be afraid anymore.”

“Nn, nn...”

After taking a deep breath, Kotori finally released Shido's hand. However—At that instant.

“Eh...?!”

Suddenly, all the lights in the room went out, causing the loudest wail of today to cry out.

“WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA—!!”

“Uwah! Ca-calm down, Kotori!”

Perhaps she panicked due to the sudden turn of events, in the pitch black darkness, Kotori pounced on Shido. Shido gently patted Kotori's back attempting to calm her down, at the same time he took out his handphone as a form of illumination.

“Is it a power trip...? I'll go and take a look, so can you stay here and wait for me...”

“I dun wadda!” (I don't wanna)

Kotori said using a voice that was on the verge of breaking down, hugging him tightly.

“There's no helping it then... Let's go and take a look together.”

“Au—”

Shido stood up, with Kotori tightly gripping onto his hand. Using the weak light for illumination, they slowly moved from the corridor to the circuit breaker.

“Eh... There’s nothing wrong with the circuit breaker. Don’t tell me it’s a power outage?”

“Eh? Ehh...?!”

Probably thinking that everything would be alright once they arrived here, Kotori couldn’t help but cry out.

“T-then what should we do...?”

“Well... I guess we’ll have to make do until the power comes back on again.”

After Shido said that, Kotori’s eyes widened in horror.

“No... No way...! Absolutely not!”

“Even if you say that, there’s nothing I can do.”

Shido scratched his head feeling troubled. However Kotori, whose body was quivering like a small animal raised her head as though she had just thought of an idea. “T-that’s right! Onii-chan, let’s go to the <Fraxinus>!”

“Ahh, you’re right. We still have that option.”

Not even waiting for Shido to finish his sentence, Kotori took out her earphone and put it into her ear.

“...He, hello! It’s Kotori Itsuka, is this Murasame-san?!”

Kotori seemed to be in panic as she spoke through the earphone.

“Ah, Reine! Can you immediately bring the two of us—Eh?”

Kotori was midway through her words when she stopped and turned to look at Shido.

“O... Onii-chan...”

“Wh.. What’s the matter?”

“T-that is... she said that there’s something wrong with the transfer unit... it will only be fixed tomorrow morning...”

“Ah, is that so?”

Shido frowned as he replied. Reine and the others just made use of that not too long ago... can it really happen in such a short time span? Although he was not sure of the exact details, if they were unable to make use of the transfer device, then they would be unable to enter the ship. It seems that they couldn't use that plan.

"...Let's go back to the living room, then."

"Uu... nn..."

Kotori made an uneasy sound, following Shido's back as she held his hand tight. Shido carefully made his way through the pitch black corridor. When they arrived at the entrance of the living room, Kotori suddenly stopped in her footsteps.

"? What's wrong, Kotori? Aren't you going in?"

"Gah... um."

Kotori looked embarrassed, she rubbed her thighs together as she lowered her head and twisted her body.

"I... I need to go to the washroom..."

"Ha? Oh, then you should go then."

You don't have to explicitly voice it out... just as Shido was contemplating that, Kotori shook her head with a degree of force that one might worry that it would fall off.

"H-how can I go...!"

"You can't hold it in for an entire night..."

"Uu... uuuu..."

Kotori frowned and raised her head, after taking a look at the dark corridor, she swiftly conveyed her thoughts to Shido using eye contact, there's just no way she can do it!

"B-bring the toilet bowl over...! I'm going to do it here!"

"Idiot! How can I bring that over!"

"T-then I'll settle for diapers, hurry up and give it to me!"

"You should just go—"

Just as Shido started to speak, the doorbell rang.

“Eek...?!”

Kotori’s body gave a violent jolt and pounced on Shido, lowering her head and fidgeting.

“Uu, uuu... I think it came out a little...”

“Eh?”

“N-nothing at all!”

Although there were many things that he did not understand, he couldn’t very well leave a visitor outside unattended. Shido walked towards the entrance dragging Kotori along with him.

“I’m coming, who is it...”

After opening the door, standing outside was a tall male carrying an enormous cardboard box with his cap worn at the eyebrow level.

“Good evening. This is a package that was sent to your house.”

“You are still delivering... at this time?”

“Yes! Do use it immediately!”

Shido tilted his head. That voice feels familiar somehow.

“Don’t tell me you are, Kannazuki-sa—”

“! I’ll just leave this here then!”

“About that... don’t you need me to stamp it...?”

But the man left, just as Shido was midway through his words.

“What in the world is going on here...”

Shido stared at the door for a while before shutting it, looking at the cardboard box. After moving it to the corridor, he tore the tape and opened it. Inside the box was a duck-shaped urinal for infants and diapers.

“T-this is...”

“!! H-hurry up and give that to me!”

Kotori yelled out, taking out the urinal from the cardboard box, squatting over it.

“H-hold on a minute! If you are going to do this it is going to be wrong on so many levels?!”



“I’m already at my limit here...!”

Kotori yelled as though she had run out of options, using her hands to hold her abdomen. Shido couldn’t help but sigh lightly.

“I understand. I will follow you then.”

Saying that, Kotori hesitated for an instant before nodding her head.

“Nn... Thank you, Onii-chan.”

Kotori said to him with an honest expression, putting more strength into holding Shido’s hand.

“Uuh...”

Shido let out a groan. Somehow due to being constantly scolded by her recently, when the current Kotori is able to honestly rely on him like this, it made him feel extremely happy. Shido made his way to the washroom, building up his Onii-chan power as he did so.

“Well then, I’ll wait for you here then.”

“Nn...”

After Kotori slightly nodded her head, she timidly opened the door to the toilet.

“Kya...!”

However, she couldn’t help but hold her breath and retreat a few steps back upon gazing into space resembling a black hole. Well, to be honest Shido did understand how she felt, after all he too felt slightly creeped out. The current Kotori must be full of fear right now.

“I can’t do it... I’m too scared...!”

“Even if you say that... there’s no other way. Isn’t it going to come out already?”

“Uuh...”

After Kotori made a tiny whine, she seemed to have thought of something as she opened her mouth to speak.

“O-Onii-chan should come in as well!”

“Ha... Haa?”

Hearing her sudden solution, Shido accidentally let out an agitated voice while frowning.

“You, what are you saying? How can I—”

“Then I will do it inside the urinal! Or I will do it right here! I’ve already made my resolution!”

“What the hell!”

“Oh no, I’m at my limit! It’s coming out!”

“Ah, really... I got it already!”

He couldn’t very well let his fourteen year old sister do a disgraceful thing like leaking. As such Shido entered the toilet while holding Kotori’s hand.

“Onii-chan, please look the other way...”

“Oo, oh...”

Following her instructions, he turned his body towards the door. Very swiftly Kotori started to move behind Shido’s back, hearing the sound of thin fabric rubbing against each other, Shido got a shock.

“Um, Onii-chan... Can you please cover your ears...?”

“! Ah, s-sorry...”

He totally did not notice this fact. Shido hastily used his hands to plug his two ears. After which Kotori used her two hands to tightly hug Shido’s body. ... Although Shido wasn’t the cause, he somehow felt that he was doing something extremely wrong, causing his heart to beat violently. An extremely massive sense of immorality filled his heart, exiting from his nose as heated breathing. Not long after, the two hands that were wrapped around his body relaxed, softly hugging his back.

“It’s alright now. ... Thank you.”

“Nn... You’re welcome.”

Saying that, Shido and Kotori walked out of the washroom together. The problem was finally solved, Shido breathed a sigh of relief. However the next problem swiftly appeared—a few minutes right after they came out of the toilet.

“I think... Since we can’t do anything due to the power outage, why don’t we turn in early for the night.”

As soon as Shido said that, Kotori made a voice of displeasure.

“Ehh—...”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s just... I haven’t taken a bath today...”

Although the electricity reliant water heater has stopped working, the power outage happened not too long ago, therefore the water in the bathtub should still be warm. However...

“...But, the bathroom is pitch dark as well, you know? Will you be alright?”

“Uuu... But my body’s all sticky...”

“Well you did make a big ruckus just now.”

After Shido spoke, Kotori pouted.

“A-about that, Onii-chan...”

“Nn? So you’re finally giving up?”

“If, if it’s possible, let’s bathe together...”

“No way!”

It was true that they used to take baths together when they were young, but it’s impossible to bathe with his sister whose secondary sex characteristics are beginning to show. Shido frantically waved his hands and objected. Kotori tightly clung onto Shido’s body and pleaded.

“Onii-chan... This is my life’s greatest wish... Please bathe with me...”

Kotori begged with a sobbing voice, rushing towards Shido with a tear-streaked face. Shido made a troubled expression and lightly sighed.

“Doing this is just not right...”

“There’s no problem, because it’s impossible to see due to the darkness! Also, we’re siblings!”

“Um...”

“Oniiiiiii-chaaaaaaan...”

“I got it, I got it. I’ll bathe with you, so stop clinging onto me!”

Faced with Kotori’s forceful advances, Shido finally gave in, he raised his two arms up to indicate his surrender. Only then did Kotori release her hold of Shido’s body.

“Really now... Only for today, alright?”

After leading Kotori into the changing room and preparing bath towels as well as clothes to change into, he started to take off his clothes with his back turned to Kotori.

“Uu...”

However, resistance still existed within him. Even though they were siblings, bathing with a person of the opposite sex and similar age still does not feel right... If Kotori were to speak of this incident to anybody, Shido may very well be met with the death penalty in society. Needless to say, neither his friends nor his parents must know of this.

Just as Shido was contemplating these problems, behind his back came the sound of Kotori taking off her clothes. It seems that she has started to make preparations to enter the bath. As such Shido, too, hastily finished removing his clothes, placing them in the washing basket.

“Onii-chan... are you done?”

“O-oh... yeah.”

A room devoid of light. Although his eyes have already gotten used to the darkness, he could only roughly see Kotori’s outline. However once he recalled that the sister before him is currently in a state with her clothes removed, he couldn’t help but panic.

“Onii-chan...?”

“Aaah... I’m sorry, let’s go in.”

After Shido entered the bathroom, he carefully felt for and removed the cover of the bathtub, immersing his body inside. Usually he should first wash his body clean before entering the bath, but since they were currently in a special situation as well as in their own home, that could be ignored. Closely behind Shido, Kotori too entered the bathtub. Facing Shido, she sat down in the bathtub like how she did during P.E. lessons. Due to two people entering the tub, a large amount of water flowed out as a result.

“Ah... A bath feels great.”

“Uu, nn... After bathing in warm water I feel less scared compared to just now...”

The legs of the two constantly touched as they engaged in conversation. However, the two soon felt embarrassed due to the sense of fear dissipating, as a result they soon fell into silence.

“...”

God knows how long had passed, Kotori seemed to have made up her mind about something as she started to speak to Shido.

“U-um... Onii-chan. Don’t you think... it’s a little cramped in here?”

“Nn? This is a bathtub designed for a single person after all. Well, since you seem fine by yourself, then I’ll go—”

“Th-that’s not what I meant!”

Sounds of water splashing could be heard. It seems that Kotori was waving her hands on the water surface.

“I’m saying... Can I go over there...”

“Eh?”

Shido tilted his head in question, before he even had the chance to reply, Kotori suddenly stood up, turned around before entering the bathtub once more. The end result was Kotori sitting on Shido’s body.

“Eehh...?!”

His thighs, stomach, and chest were all in close contact with Kotori’s soft skin. Shido’s body froze due to Kotori’s sudden action. ... To be honest, he was truly careless. Although he kept saying “How can we bathe together...”, deep down, he felt that since they had already bathed together a few times before, there was no way he would commit any mistakes. But, this is simply the worst. The absolute worst.

What he felt from Kotori, who was sitting on him, was not the weight of his cute sister, but the attractive warmth and feeling of a female. If he was unable to control himself here, Shido would have reached the point of no return. When his parents return from overseas work, he may possibly have to introduce a new family member to them. However Kotori did not sense Shido’s thoughts at all, simply laughing.

“Ahaha... Onii-chan is scared as well.”

“Eh? W-why do you say that...”

“That’s because your heart is beating even faster now?”

Saying that, Kotori got even closer to him.

“The one I’m frightened of is you!”

Shido yelled out within his mind. I'm at my limit soon, I have to hurry up and get away from Kotori. Even though he said that the current Kotori was in a state of fear, she would not be leaving Shido's side that easily.

"Ah... That's right."

Shido suddenly recalled something, using his hand to cover his mouth, he remained silent for a period of time. Probably feeling that something was off about Shido, Kotori spoke to Shido.

"Onii-chan? What's wrong with you...?"

And then towards Kotori, Shido used a low, menacing voice to reply.

"Hehehe... Your Onii-chan has already disappeared from this body..."

"Kya...?!"

Kotori held her breath, her body started to tremble. That's right. Since Kotori did not wish to leave Shido's side, then he'll have to scare her to make her leave.

"O-Onii-chan?!"

"This body has already been possessed by me..."

"H-how can this be..."

"Kotori-chan, there's a very nice smell coming from your body... it smells very delicious..."

"Waaaaaaaaa! Waaaaaaaaaaa!"

Kotori let out a wail, frantically moving her limbs. After that she stood up as though she wanted to escape from the bathtub. Alright... Shido reflexively clenched his fist. She fell for it, now it'll be alright once she escape into the changing room— However,

"Onii-chan! Onii-chaaaaaaaaan—!"

Kotori seemed to have remembered something as she suddenly turned around, attempting to enter the bath once more. Furthermore, due to her panic, her foot slipped, falling towards Shido. The same time Shido's face made contact with an extremely soft and warm area—he gave a wail. Kotori who suffered a fright due to this let out a wail as well.

"Waa—!" "Waa—!"

...Screams continued to resound from the bathroom.

"A-are you alright, Kotori...?!"

“Nn... and Onii-chan...?”

“Oh, I’m fine too...”

Peace at last. Shido, having changed into his pajamas, spoke as he rubbed the part of his head that hit the side of the bathtub. Although he suffered multiple injuries, he has somehow avoided the worst case scenario. Even though he is the older brother he couldn’t very well make a mistake because of love. Based on the time indicated on his phone, it seems that two or three hours had passed.

“Since we’ve already brushed our teeth, let’s sleep now.”

“Nn... You’re right...”

Kotori nodded, holding Shido’s hand in a natural fashion. Due to the recent turn of events, this made Shido’s heart skip a beat... However, he still had his pride as her brother, so he did not openly voice it. Just as Shido was about to enter his own room, Kotori suddenly exerted more force into her grip. ...Well, he had already expected as much from the series of events. But Shido still turned to face Kotori.

“What’s wrong, Kotori?”

“...Today, please sleep with me?”

“...I expected as much—”

Shido silently mumbled, nodding his head as though he had completely given up.

“Alright. But it’s only for today.”

“! That’s wonderful!”

Kotori let out a joyful voice. Well, what’s this compared to bathing together..? Shido and Kotori first went inside Kotori’s room to take her pillow before moving to Shido’s room. After placing his phone on the shelf near the bed, Shido lay on the bed.

“Hey, Kotori. Be careful not to fall.”

“Nn!”

After Kotori placed her pillow, she too joined Shido. After Shido stroked her head, he pulled the blanket and began to sleep.

“Good night, Kotori.”

“Nn... Good night, Onii-chan.”

Kotori spoke in a small voice. Although he couldn't see her expression, he felt that she was probably smiling when she said that. Perhaps it was due to fatigue, but before even ten minutes had passed, Shido had already slipped into a deep sleep. Just before he totally fell asleep,

“Today... really, thanks a lot. —I love you so much, Onii-chan.”

Seemingly hearing something like that, as well as feeling something soft on his cheek... Whether it was real or just a dream, Shido could no longer tell. On the main screen on the bridge of <Fraxinus>, Shido and Kotori were shown sleeping closely next to each other. Looking at the image, the crew members nodded with satisfaction, clapping their hands together, some of them even started tearing due to the influx of emotions. Among them, there was also one that was screaming, “Why aren't there scenes of the toilet and the bathroooooooooooooom?!”, but would be alright to ignore him.

In a nutshell, the present was successfully given to Kotori. Reine watched the screen as she quietly spoke.

“...Happy birthday, Kotori.”

“Seiya!”

“Gao...?!”

The next morning. Accompanied with the sunlight shining through the window, the violent impact generated at his torso, caused Shido's body to nearly break in two.

“Hmph, what kind of cry was that, you can stay here and act like a lion if you want.”

A strong voice sounded out. Kotori, who had already changed, was standing right there eating a lollipop. —On a side note, her hair was currently tied up with black ribbons.

“Kotori... That is.”

Due to the power outage last night, Kotori's black ribbons should still be unwashed...

“Ah.”

At this point, Shido noticed something. Those black ribbons were too clean and neat to have been used for five years.

“You've already... put them on huh.”

That's right. The ribbons Kotori is using right now were Shido's present from last night. After all, Kotori had been using the black ribbons since Shido gave them to her five years ago. Although she had always treasured them, wear and tear was unavoidable. The quality became rough, and threads began to come out. Shido, who had noticed this fact, bought ribbons identical to the ones five years ago and gave them to Kotori once more.

"Well, Shido's performance is average I guess. I'll commend you for that."

Saying that, Kotori jumped from Shido's body to the floor.

"Nnn..."

Shido slowly sat up, rubbing his throbbing chest as he did so.

"But... since you've already woken up you could have woken me up as well. You don't have to open the present and wake me after wearing that..."

"Hmph, the person who can't wake up only has himself to blame. —Furthermore, I already opened all the presents yesterday. I won't do something as rude as setting aside gifts for a night."

Her words and actions were totally opposite from yesterday. Shido couldn't help but sigh while missing that cute little sister.

"Really now, you were still crying and shouting 'Onii-chan, Onii-chan' yesterday too..."

"Mach Pierce!"

"Guha?!"

Kotori hit him with an attack that utilized her full strength; Shido groaned from the impact.

"You better come down quickly. —Even though it's a little simple, I've already made breakfast"

"Eh?"

Shido could not stop himself from widening his eyes in surprise. Kotori was bad at cooking...

"How rare. Have you been planning to do so?"

"...I just felt like doing it, and I'm not too sure about the taste either."

"That doesn't matter. Thank you."

"...Hmph"

As Kotori finished, she twirled the stick of the lollipop in her mouth and walked out of the room.

“...Nn?”

At this moment, he suddenly realized something. Kotori's words just now... there was something odd about them. She claimed to have already opened all the gifts the previous night. But ever since the power outage, Kotori had always been with Shido. If Kotori had the opportunity to move about by herself, she would only have had the few minutes after Shido fell asleep... But that would mean Kotori would have to walk inside the pitch black house, in the middle of the night, by herself, to the living room. If she was able to accomplish that, then wouldn't she be able to go to the toilet and bathe by herself...?

“Forget it... That's impossible.”

Shido shrugged. How can Kotori, who was so afraid of the dark, do that? She must have opened it when Shido was unaware.

“—Shido! You're too slow!”

“Oh no...”

The terrifying Imouto-sama's voice could be heard from the bottom of the staircase. Shido hastily walked out of the room.

“...Hmph”

As Kotori finished, she twirled the stick of the lollipop in her mouth and walked out of the room.

“...Nn?”

At this moment, he suddenly realized something.

Kotori's words just now... there was something odd about them.

She claimed to have already opened all the gifts the previous night.

But ever since the power outage, Kotori had always been with Shido.

If Kotori had the opportunity to move about by herself, she would only have had the few minutes after Shido fell asleep... But that would mean Kotori would have to walk inside the pitch black house, in the middle of the night, by herself, to the living room.

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“—Shido! You’re too slow!”

“Oh no...”

The terrifying imouto-sama’s voice could be heard from the bottom of the staircase, as such, Shido hastily walked out of the room.

End.

Yamai Lunchtime

September 1st. The second day of school after the summer break.

In the uproar of the lunch break, Shido is walking down the stairs next to his classroom.

“Kuku... be honored, Shido, to be able to present us Maiden of Cyclones, Yamai, with food.”

“Gratitude. Thank you for showing us the way.”

The voices could be heard from Shido’s back. Shido let out a breath and glanced in that direction.

Two girls with the same face in a school uniform are there.

A slender girl who tied her hair up is throwing her head back and laughing arrogantly, while another girl with a model-like figure who braided her hair up is bowing in a dazed look.

Yamai Kaguya and Yamai Yuzuru. The twin Spirits whose powers Shido sealed two months ago.

“No, it is me who should apologize. It was my miscommunication to begin with.”

“Don’t worry, I am being generous today; after all, I could be in a different class from Yuzuru. Yuzuru is too cute. If she is left alone, I don’t know how many bad insects will come near her.”

“Relief. Yuzuru is also relieved. Thinking that I might have to leave a super-beautiful girl such as Kaguya alone in the middle of a pack of wolves gave me shivers.”

“No, fufu... Yuzuru is way cuter”

“Disagreement. Kaguya is cuter.”

“Aw you, Yuzuru”

“Counterattack. Kaguya”

Saying that, Kaguya and Yuzuru blushed and started to entwine each other’s fingers. They are intimate enough that Shido feels embarrassed just by looking at them.

That is right. The Yamai sisters are joining 3rd class of 2nd year of Raizen High School starting today.

Initially they were considered to be transferred into the same 4th class as Shido, however since their mental condition will stay stable enough if they are together, they ended up getting transferred into the next class instead.

Well, that is okay. Since these two had joined the school trip as transfer students who will be transferring into the school in the new semester, this is to be expected.

However, nobody had told Shido the schedule until today.

As a result — Shido couldn't prepare a boxed lunch for the Yamai sisters.

That is why they, and Shido, are going to the school store on the 1st floor.

“We are almost there —”

Shido stopped at the familiar-looking girl that appeared before him.

A doll-like girl with her hair cut around her shoulder fastened with a hairpin. The girl is holding bread in a bag and a small milk carton in her hands.

“Oh, Origami. You are buying from the school store today too?”

When Shido asked, the girl — Tobiichi Origami nodded.

“Sometimes, when I am busy. Shido too?”

“No, today is Kaguya's and Yuzuru's.”

“I see.”

Origami shortly answered and continued walking upstairs.

“Consent. If the store is Master Origami's favorite, then it might be worth looking forward to.”

Yuzuru nodded at Origami's back while seeing her off. Come to think of it, Yuzuru started calling Origami her master for some reason after the school trip.

“Well... it depends on which kind of bread.”

Shido walked down the stairs with a wry smile.

After walking for a short while — they can feel an abnormal air of excitement before them.

“Hmm? That is...?”

Kaguya, who is walking behind Shido, said with a dubious voice.

That is not surprising. Among other things, numerous students are gathering on the first floor — in front of the school store as if it is a scene of year's end sales or rush hours in the morning.

“Croquette bread please! Also a strawberry milk!” “Ew, don’t pull my clothes!” “Listen! The only good curry bread is the one that I eat!” “I must get it no matter what!” “Medic! Mediiiiiiiiic!” “Dammit, just for some bread, why?!”

The crowds clamored. Screams could be heard. Shrieks are deafening everyone’s ears.

The fierce scene of a battlefield appeared over there from the imbalance of one store lady handling numerous students.

“Ew, as I thought, it was too late. Looks like we have to wait a little before we can buy it.”

Shido scratched his head and mumbled.

Although Shido had not used the school store for quite some time since his first year, the scene of a battlefield was always there when he failed the sprint.

However, Kaguya and Yuzuru only lifted the corners of their lips at such a scene in front of the school store.

“What, what. This really gets me worked up. And when I thought they all are just livestock without any fangs, it seems like they still have a fighting instinct within them after all. Kuku, this boiled up my blood. Yuzuru?”

“Excitement. Not bad. While the past two months have been comfortable, my body was getting rusty.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru looked at each other and stepped forward.

“H-hey, you two.”

“Don’t worry, Shido. I just have to pay the store owner inside the store, don’t I?”

“Agreement. Then that is easy. For Yuzuru and Kaguya, there is nothing impossible.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru then started running out at the same moment.

When they reached the outer edge of the students, Yuzuru bent down one of her knees and clasped her hands.

“Setup. — Kaguya.”

“Aw right!”

Kaguya shouted and mounted her legs on Yuzuru’s hands. Incidentally, the slippers Kaguya was wearing were already thrown to the back without anyone realizing.

“Haaaaa!”

With the shouting, Kaguya’s body is dancing in the air.

She then leaped over other student’s heads and made a curve to the front of the school store.

However—

“Secret Arts – ‘Fallen Hero’ Icarus Faaaaaall!!”

The moment such a voice is heard from somewhere, someone fiercely blew Kaguya’s body from the left side with his body.

“Wha... ukyaa?!”

Kaguya shrieked and lost her balance mid-air.

She then fell quite a distance before her destination and engulfed the pack of students.

“Gywaaaaa?!”

“Shiver. Kaguya!”

Yuzuru widened her eyes and called Kaguya’s name.

And — as if they were responding to her voice, all the students stopped moving all of sudden.

Yuzuru thought for a moment that the students were responding to her voice... but she was wrong.

The reason was known right away. A pungent smell is drifting from somewhere.

“W-what is this smell...”

The students knitted their eyebrows and pinched their nose. That is not surprising. The smell went through their nostrils and induced nausea. If someone were to mix garbage, a dead body of an animal, waste water in the middle of summer, then added a little bit of skunk’s fart, it might smell like this. The shocking smell that could take away any appetite in a single breath.

Frightened at the smell, the students started covering their nose and mouth. While they were doing that, someone walked through them and finished the purchases at the school store.

Few moments later, the pungent smell disappeared. The students who had lost their appetite regained their appetite and started the scramble once again.

— Few minutes later.

“U... kyuuu...”

In front of the school store that had already become sparse, Kaguya, who had few footsteps printed on her back, made those miserable sounds while still lying down on the floor.

“Confirmation. Kaguya, are you okay?”

Yuzuru ran to her and lent her a hand. Kaguya took that hand and stood up, staggering. Even though it was only a few minutes from earlier, she seemed worn-out for some reason.

“D-damn... what was that... did they do it because they knew I am the Maiden of Cyclones – Yamai Kaguya...?!”

Even though she said that, those words only echoed around vacantly. Kaguya ground her teeth and let out her breath.

“There is no choice... let’s first feed our stomach and heal our body. Yuzuru, let’s buy some bread.”

“Agreement. Let’s do it.”

Kaguya walked staggeringly to the school store with Yuzuru supporting her.

However, their faces went gloomy at the goods displayed on the shelf.

“Owner, don’t you have anything else?”

“Complaint. This is too horrible.”

That is understandable. After all, on the shelf that is nearly completely hunted down, only two bags of bread crust remained. Even more, there is only a pack of jam left.

“I am sorry, but this is all?”

The store lady said with a calm voice as if the fierce battle scene earlier never happened. The two were frustrated for a short while, but gave up in the end, paid the lady the money, and slowly returned to Shido.

However, on their way.

A little girl ran from their side and bumped into them.

“Ugu?!”

“Caution. Who are you.”

The two frown. The girl then raised her head and started shaking her shoulders.

“I-I am sorry, I am in a hurry...”

Said that, the girl made a crying face.

Seeing the girl’s weak looks, the Yamai sisters quickly calmed down. They let out a breath and said “don’t worry” while waving their hands at her.

The two then returned to Shido. Shido made a wry smile at them unconsciously.

“That was quite a disaster...”

“S-shut up! This is only an accident! Our true abilities are not like this!”

“Anger. As Kaguya said. I can’t overlook any insult to Kaguya even if it was from Shido.”

“N-no, I didn’t mean to insult her... Hey, wait, you two.”

Shido noticed something strange and pointed to their hands.

“Where did you put the bread you bought just now?”

“What?”

“Question. What do you mean?”

The two then inclined their heads while looking at their own hands and twisted their faces in fear.

That is not surprising. The bag of bread crusts in their hand until now is reduced to just the tip of the bag they are holding with their finger.

“Wha... this is...”

“Puzzlement. Where is the bread...”

“— Fufu, fufufufu, fuhahahahaha!!”

While both two are looking around at their surroundings, such shrill laughter is heard from somewhere.

“W-who?!”

The moment Kaguya shouted, someone jumped in front of her. The person placed his hands on the floor and made a forward roll followed by two somersaults and landed in front of her.

The person is a tall man with sharp eyes and his hair cut like a crest. For some reason his uniform is torn off at his shoulder and both of his arms are covered with bandages. Furthermore, a bag of Yakisoba bread and a fruit-flavored milk hang from his waist.

“Optimistic. How optimistic you are. Do you think you can use the school store with that level?”

“Huh...?”

While Shido was still gaping at the situation, a man in white coat appeared from behind the pillar. A scientist-looking slim man wearing round glasses. In his hand there is a ham-egg sandwich and coffee milk.

“Well, let me welcome you. Welcome, new recruits, to our battlefield.”

He said that and turned his coat. Inside his coat, several test tubes with corks could be seen.

When everyone was making puzzled looks, another person appeared from behind the pillar.

She is a girl with a large plastic bag on her back like Santa Claus. Looking closer, the girl is the student who bumped into the Yamai sisters earlier.

“Amazement. You are.”

When Yuzuru said that, the girl then made a scornful smile as if her weak appearance earlier was made up.

“Kyahaha — you won’t be able to get any bread if you are like that.”

Said that, the girl then took the bread crust out of her plastic bag and played with it on her hands.

“That is!”

“Stare. Yuzuru and Kaguya’s bread crust.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru gave them hard stares and fixed their gazes.

“Damn you, who are you?!”

When Kaguya shouted, those three put up a bold smile on their face.

“Hmph... then let us introduce ourselves!”

The man with a crest-like haircut spread out his arms and lifted up his leg.

“Exceeding the mass with a flexible body and the legs that were hardened from the gymnastic club. The noble of midair – ‘Gonna Fly If You Blown It’ <Aerial> Washitani Shunsuke! The ‘Supreme Masterpiece’ Favorite One is Yakisoba bread!”

“What is with that nickname? Also normally nobody said those things by themselves...”

Shido frowned and narrowed his eyes.

However those three seemed unconcerned. Next, the glassed man in white coat pushed his glasses then bent his body back taking a somewhat intelligent-looking pose.

“Misusing the science club’s budget to create a fragrance that took away everyone’s appetite! The scent of death – ‘Stink Panic’ <Professor> Karasuma Keiji. The ‘Supreme Masterpiece’ Favorite One is a ham-egg sandwich.”

“What a nuisance you are...”

And finally, the girl with the plastic bag on her back made a pose.

“Put others off-guard with that cute look, then pickpocket the bread with lightning speed! The wizard of bewilderment – ‘Oops I’m Sorry’ <Pickpocket> Saginuma Ayumi! The ‘Supreme Masterpiece’ Favorite One is everything stolen from others!”

“Isn’t that a crime!”

“Kyahaha, don’t underestimate me — check your pocket!”

“What?”

Hearing that, Kaguya and Yuzuru then began searching their skirt’s pockets.

“Huh... there is money in it.”

“Amazement. This is the price of the bread crust.”

The threes purred their nose and gave signal to each other with their eyesight —

’ — We are the Four Heavenly Kings of Raizen High School’s school store!!’

They declared themselves in loud voices after taking a deep breath.

... For some reason, Shido felt they could get along well with the Yamai sisters (especially Kaguya).

“Four Heavenly Kings... you said?”

Kaguya said with a thrilled voice. The three then made villainous smiles.

“Fufu, exactly. The strongest warriors who conquered the school store of Raizen High School. That is us, Four Heavenly Kings!”

“Kukiki, that was some greetings for you new faces.”

“Kyahaha, but if you are this weak I don’t think you should come anymore?”

Four Heavenly Kings said and laughed. The Yamai sisters then gave them hard stares.

“Say what?! Are you trying to ridicule us Yamai, Maidens of Cyclones?!”

“Anger. I won’t forgive any insults.”

However, within that tense situation, Shido could only scratch his cheek.

Although there are few things on his mind, there is one important thing he wanted to say to them.

“You said Four Heavenly Kings... but there are only three of you.”

However, this question seems to be within their expectations.

“Fufufu, ‘that person’ is the strongest of us. She doesn’t usually make any appearance!”

“Right. Nicknamed ‘Perfectionist’ <Miss Perfect>. The person full of mystery who always got her hands on the bread without anyone realizing...”

“You who can’t even defeat us is no match for that person —”

The Four Heavenly Kings said in a ridiculing tone. When Shido didn’t feel anything, it was different for the Yamai sisters. They grind their teeth in anger.

“Damn you, don’t you think you can go back just fine. You have to pay with your life for making fun of us! Be stuck in purgatory and regret your actions!”

“Declaration. We can no longer overlook your countless offenses. We are asking you for a challenge.”

However, the Four Heavenly Kings are still smiling with allowances even when they are exposed to the two’s penetrating stares.

“Fu... the battle for today has already ended. Don’t be such a bad loser.”

“Kukiki, however, I like that spirit of yours. We are the strongest. Before us, nobody could get the bread they wanted.”

“I am always open to challenges? Let’s see, for the time...”

<Pickpocket> Saginuma looked at the calendar next to the store while saying that.

“Ara, what good timing. Next Monday, there will be a limited edition bread. It is Rainbow Cream Bread for this month. How about... whoever is the first to get that will win?”

The Yamai sisters nodded at that sweet voice.

“Fine. The debt of the school store should be repaid with the school store. I’ll make you taste the taste of bread crust!”

“Declaration. I will make you regret your words.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru pointed their fingers at them. After the three shrugged in pleasantness, they looked at Shido with a mocking sight.

“Fu... seems like you’ve for some well-spirited pupil, ‘No Reaction’ <Dispel>.”

“Kukiki, I heard you’ve fallen to the ignorant box lunch faction, but it seems like you still have the pride of a school store warrior left within you.”

“But these girls won’t be any match to us?”

“What...?”

Shido inclined his head at the unfamiliar nickname. However, there is no one else around him.

“M-me?”

“What are you saying? Of course, <Dispel>. One year ago, you easily escaped my mid-air attack, escaped Karasuma’s death scent and escaped Saginuma’s pickpocket — and were able to get your Favorite One, the Katsu Sandwich. You were such a strong warrior.”

“Wait a minute, that is my first time hearing that.”

Shido could not resist raising his voice. Even though he used the school store quite a few times during the first year and Katsu Sandwich was his favorite, he couldn’t remember that name.

“Are you saying you have already forgotten the thrilling battle with us?”

“No, I mean...”

“Fu — it is fine if you want to play dumb.”

“Kukiki, however your pupil seems to be in full spirits.”

“Kyahaha, although it is a waste of time either way”

Even though Shido tried to hold them on, they wouldn't listen to his story until the end. The Four Heavenly Kings made a villain laugh while walking off down the corridor.

Kaguya stared at them until they completely disappeared and stamped down on the floor.

“Damn! Making a fool of us! I'll let them see!”

“Agreement. I won't let them say the same the second time. — However, it is also the fact that Yuzuru and Kaguya lose. In order to clean up our names, special training is required.”

“Special training...”

Kaguya and Yuzuru looked at Shido.

Shido felt a sweat floating everywhere in his face at the bad feeling that went through his body.



The next day. September 2nd. Saturday.

“Yawn...”

Shido yawned. He is currently wearing a jersey with a headband on his head and bamboo sword in his hand.

Of course, he did not dress like this because he wanted to.

Thanks to that nickname he doesn't know anything about, Shido has been asked by the Yamai sisters as the coach for their special training.

“Even though I thought the normal uniform was fine too...”

Shido is currently in a hall surrounded by a gray wall. The virtual training space inside the mid-air ship <Fraxinus>.

By using the Realizer with equipment within the ship, it will allow them to recreate any kind of environment. Kotori offered to let them use this room for the special training.

While Shido is still trying hard to resist his drowsiness, two unique speaking voices could be heard.

“Kuku, how pitiful. I see you still can't escape from the spell of Hypnos.”

“Greeting. Good morning.”

Seems like they had also arrived. Shido looked the way the voices come from while rubbing his eyes —

“Right... Good mor — ?!”

He froze for a split second.

After all, the uniform they both are currently wearing is the infamous near-extinct Bloomer-type gym clothes.



The label “Kaguya” and “Yuzuru” are written on their chest on their white uniform, under that is the Bloomer — the longing of all high school boys of the present age. Incidentally, while Kaguya left her shirt on top of the bloomer, Yuzuru tucked her shirt inside it.

“Hmp? I don’t know why, but it seems like you are now awake.”

“Detection. Shido’s sight seems more intense than usual.”

“Kaka. It means he is that spirited. Isn’t that a good thing.”

“Question. Is that so.”

Kaguya laughed broadly but Yuzuru inclined her head. Shido averted his eyes from them and continued.

“You two, what is with that uniform...”

“Ah, this one? Kotori prepared them for us. From what I heard, it seems to be the traditional training uniform of this country.”

“Evaluation. It is really easy to move in this cloth. I especially like the mobility of the legs.”

“...Is that so.”

Shido scratched his cheek. If they like it, then Shido doesn’t really mind.

“Then, Shido. Let’s start our training. In order to defeat those people!”

“Petition. Please take good care of us. I won’t ever forget the taste of that jam.”

Saying that, they both nodded with determination.

After the battle yesterday, Kaguya and Yuzuru rejected Shido’s offer to share his boxed lunch with them and instead opted to suck the leftover jam with their fingers to stave off their starvation. They said by tasting the taste of defeat, they could better sharpen their fangs for revenge.

Shido made an empty laugh and looked at them.

“...So in short, you just have to evade their obstacles and buy the bread, don’t you?”

“That’s right. Also, if we could give those blasphemers a humiliation they could never forget for their entire life, that would be great.”

“Agreement. What should we do?”

They both nodded. Shido took out a notebook from his pocket.

The result of the discussion with Reine yesterday was a relatively simple method.

“Er... first —”

Shido explained to them the method to defeat the Four Heavenly Kings in order in simple words.

“Hmm... I see.”

“Understanding. I understand.”

The Yamai sisters nodded. Shido closed his notebook and put it inside his pocket.

“Well, like that. If you pay attention to those points, it should be okay.”

“Fumu. Then, what should we do?”

“Eh?”

Shido raised a shrill voice at Kaguya’s question.

“Verify. Let me ask again. What kind of training should Yuzuru and Kaguya take from now?”

“No... to be honest, I don’t think that is necessary.”

Shido said while frowning. It was not a lie, nor was it an excuse because he doesn’t want to help them with the training, but it was simply the fact that he thought.

“Well, if you think about it, even though your Spirit powers are sealed, your physical ability is far above normal humans. Yesterday was just a surprise attack, there is no way you will lose if you prepare for it. Also, even you said training, nothing will dramatically changed —”

“What are you saying!”

Shido’s words are interrupted by Kaguya’s yell.

“We lost to them once! In order to overturn that, there is no choice but to throw ourselves into the hell of training and be reborn as the New Yamai!”

“Agreement. The new skills of the main character are always obtained after harsh training in the middle of the story.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru pleaded enthusiastically. Seems like they just want to do the training regardless of the results... Come to think of it, Kotori said the Yamai sisters got hooked on a Shounen Manga back during summer break.

“O-okay, I understand.”

Shido stopped them before they could approach him and thought up a training program.

“Ah... well, let’s do some warm-up exercises with running.”

The moment Shido said that, the noise ran through the wall and the scenery around them turned into a high plateau in an instant.

“O-ohh?!”

Shido widened his eyes. So this is the function of the virtual training space.

Kaguya and Yuzuru also looked around in surprise and then nodded.

“Kuku... a lightning run, huh. That’s fine. First is a warm-up.”

“Affirmative. I understand. Kaguya, a race.”

“No, even when I said running, I didn’t mean for you to race...”

Even though Shido said that, those two don’t take any notice. Seems like even after they could get along with each other, that still doesn’t change how they like to compete.

After some small stretching exercises, they both started running.

“Doryaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

“Run. Tou.”

They both started with a sprint and circled around Shido side-by-side with a speed that of a short-distance running.

However, even though they are Spirits, there is no way they could continue that forever. Not before long, their speed started declining — and Yuzuru collapsed down to the ground with her face down.

“Li... mit... Uku... u...”

“Ya... haha... I... won —”

Shortly after, Kaguya also collapsed to the ground.

“H-hey, you two!”

After a few moments, the Yamai sisters raised up after they caught their breath.

“Kuku... seems like I won this match.”

“Regret. As expected from you, Kaguya.”

“No, well, I have an advantage over you for this match. It is amazing how Yuzuru could stick this far.”

“Question. What is the advantage.”

“...Well, you don’t have to care.”

Even though Shido noticed Kaguya glanced at Yuzuru’s weighty breast for a split moment while saying those words, he decided not to say anything in order to not get into trouble.

“A-anyway, I won! You understand, Yuzuru?”

“Resignation. Ku... there is no choice. The first piece...”

“...The first piece? What are you talking about?”

When Shido inclined his head, Kaguya came near him with a smile on her face and held the scruff of his neck to force him to look away from Yuzuru.

“Ouch, what are you doing, Kaguya!”

“Kuku... just keep quiet and wait. You will see something nice.”

“Huh...? What are you trying to...”

When Shido frowned, a sound of clothes rustling was heard from his back.

“Hey, what Yuzuru is doing?”

“Well, we talked a bit earlier. Since we need some tension in our training, we agreed that the one who loses will have to undress a piece of cloth each time.”

“Huh... whaaaaat?! W-wait a minute, why are you doing that! Before that, with your current clothes, it is fatal if you undress even one piece of it —”

“Done. It is okay now.”

Before Shido could finish his sentence, Yuzuru’s voice could be heard from his back.

Kaguya turned back ahead of Shido and smiled with “Hohou...”.

“Shido, look at her.”

“Wait, I still haven’t prepared myself...”

Kaguya turned Shido’s head to Yuzuru like she did earlier.

Yuzuru is standing there with her cheek in red of embarrassment. However, Shido couldn’t tell what changed at a glance.

Not long after, Shido noticed something out of place. In Yuzuru’s hand, she is holding a large-size bra within it.

When looking closer, Shido feels as if Yuzuru’s breast size was larger than a few moments ago. The “Yuzuru” label on her breasts swayed heavily whenever Yuzuru made any movement.

“Wha...?!”

“Kaka, how was it, Shido. You can’t get enough of it, can you? The beast is rampaging after it has been released from the bindings.”

Kaguya said in a pleasant voice while Shido’s face turned red.

“W-why from the inside...”

“Explanation. I have been taught that this is the etiquette.”

“It was Reine-san who taught you, wasn’t it?!”

Shido yelled, but Yuzuru didn’t seem to mind. Yuzuru held her breast and approached Shido.

“Idea. Shido, I have a request for the next training.”

“...Request? What is it?”

“Answer. The training of endurance... in other words, waterfall training.”

“Waterfall training... is it that training where you stand under a waterfall? But there’s no —”

Before Shido could finish his words, the noise running through their surroundings and the scenery had changed into a waterfall in the middle of the mountain.

Furthermore, when Shido tried touching it, he could feel the cold. Seems like the water is real.

“Haha, anything goes, huh...”

While Shido smiled wryly, Kaguya stepped forward.

“Kuku... well, I don’t really mind. In short, the one who stays longer wins, isn’t it?”

“Affirmative. That is the case.”

After Kaguya and Yuzuru exchanged their glances, they entered the waterfall without any hesitation.

“H-hey wait! You can’t do that! Especially Yuzuru!”

“Kyaa!”

“Amazement. ... This is colder than I thought.”

However, it looks like their match has already begun. They gritted their teeth and stood still with their hands joined together in front of them like an ascetic monk.

“Wait...”

Shido averted his eyes.

It’s not strange that he did. Since they entered the waterfall with such light clothes, their gym clothes are now transparent and stuck to their skin.

It might be okay for Kaguya who still has a bra on, but Shido can’t look at Yuzuru. Shido’s face turned completely red as if a steam was coming out of his head and averted his eyes.

“Ugu...”

“Endurance...”

The two held up for a while, but started shivering before long.

“Ahh, I-I-I-I am at my l-l-l-limits...!”

Finally, Kaguya, whose lips had turned pale, ran out from below the waterfall while holding both of her shoulders.

“A-are you okay?!”

Shido wrapped Kaguya in a bath towel that he prepared during their match. Kaguya kept shivering and squatted down on the ground.

“Vic... tory. Y-Y-Y-Y-Yuzuru w-w-w-won this m-m-m-match.”

Yuzuru said those words while approaching her, her shivering teeth making her unable to speak properly. Like earlier, Shido then wrapped Yuzuru with a bath towel.

The next moment, the scenery once again changed back into a high plateau. A warm breeze was blowing from somewhere.

After their bodies warmed up, both of them raised their faces.

“Kunu... as expected from my other half. Well done.”

“Praise. This match was the opposite of our previous match. Yuzuru has more subcutaneous fat, so it was my advantage. Applause for Kaguya who could go that far.”

“Uguu...”

Kaguya twisted her face in frustration. However, she then let out a breath to change her mood and stood up while fluttering her bath towel.

“...I have no choice. A promise is a promise. Can you turn back?”

“Well, you don’t really have to...”

“I can’t just run away if Yuzuru did it!”

Kaguya flat-out said so and made Shido and Yuzuru turn away.

Just like earlier, the sound of clothes rustling is heard... Shido feels a very naughty scene is being expanded on the back of him and catches his breath without realizing. Yuzuru next to him gave him a look in half-opened eyes with a “Sigh. Pervert.” message.

“...It is okay now. I will allow you to look at me.”

“O-okay...”

Shido turned back timidly.

As expected, Kaguya who is standing over there doesn’t seem to have any visible changes, except in her hand, just like when Yuzuru did it, there is a —

“Wait, that one is different?!”

Shido shouted in surprise. The object in Kaguya’s hand is not a bra, but for the lower body — in other words, a panty.

“One piece! You don’t have anything to complain about, do you!”

“Assent. Nice thinking, Kaguya.”

Yuzuru nodded at her in admiration while folding her arms.

“H-hey, you two...”

“Guidance. Shido, please look at Kaguya carefully. Even though her appearance didn’t change, the other side of that piece of cloth is full of dreams. You can’t have enough of it, can you?”

“U... gu...”

Yuzuru bent her body near Shido and whispered those words to him. Shido’s cheeks turned red at his imagination and the cool touch of Yuzuru’s body.

Noticing their behavior, Kaguya opened her mouth.

“Let me decide the next match, and let me enjoy that embarrassing look of Yuzuru!”

“Rejection. It is Yuzuru who will win the next match. I will enjoy the looks of Kaguya shivering in embarrassment.”

Said that, both then exchanged a glance ... Even though they could get along well now, Shido feels they’re loving each other a little bit too much.

However, if Shido left them alone, they would definitely cause some trouble. Shido shook his head.

“S-stop! I will decide on the next training! Okay?! I’m your coach!”

When Shido declared that in a loud voice, Kaguya and Yuzuru looked at him with interested eyes.

“F-from now on is an individual training program! Let’s see... for the time being, Kaguya, you do sit-ups! Yuzuru, you do push-ups! 100 times each!”

Shido instructed them, however they only twisted their faces in dissatisfaction.

“What? Different programs? There’s no way to decide who will win or lose.”

“Appeal. And with those limits, there is a chance that both of us could accomplish it.”

However, in fact, those are exactly Shido’s intentions.

If the program is not the same, then there is no way to judge who wins or loses. In other words, they can’t undress their clothes anymore.

“Don’t lose your goal. What is this training for again? You want to beat those Four Heavenly Kings, don’t you?”

“Mu...”

“Thinking...”

They both fall into silence at Shido’s words.

... Even though he is the man who said “training is not necessary” earlier, they both could honestly accept his advice. Although they were reluctant, they nodded to him in the end.

“...It is as you said. Yuzuru is so cute I can’t resist not teasing her.”

“Regret. Yuzuru as well. I couldn’t constrain myself at Kaguya’s cuteness.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru looked at each other and nodded firmly.

“Well then! Let’s do it, Yuzuru!”

“Affirmative. Okay, Kaguya.”

They both nodded at each other. Shido feels reassured at their reaction.

However, for some reason, they both still were not lying down on the floor for the exercise, but kept standing in front of him.

“...What’s wrong, you two?”

“Aa, the load is not enough for a normal sit-up, so what about I entwine my legs around your stomach, Shido? I could definitely strengthen my muscles this way.”

“Idea. The tension is not enough for normal push-ups. How about Shido lying down on your back on the floor and letting Yuzuru do push-ups on top of that? The tension of Yuzuru failing allowing Shido to do anything to Yuzuru’s body will effectively —”

“R-Rejected!”

Shido shouted and ordered them a number of extra sit-ups and push-ups.



The next week. September 4th. Lunch break.

The front of the school store, although not as much as last week, was filled with students. Everyone threw themselves into the battlefield in such a tight space to get the bread they wanted.

However, Shido and the Yamai sisters are not participating in that battle. They are looking at a certain space.

— At the showy-looking three persons in front of them.

“Hmp... so you didn’t run away, <Dispel> and the pupils. Let me at least praise that courage of yours.”

“Kukiki, but that is reckless. Just regret your own incompetence with the bread crust.”

“Kyahaha, that is no good, even if it is a bread crust, I am gonna steal it from you.”

The Four Heavenly Kings made a darling smile and confronted the Yamai sisters.

Kaguya and Yuzuru fixed their eyes on them.

“Kuku, let me return those words back to you. I will make you regret opposing us Yamai!”

“Opposition. As Kaguya said. We won’t lose today.”

Hearing that, <Aerial> Washitani pushed his forehead.

“Good. There are only 20 packs of the limited bread. The stock should be low right now. —Well then, let’s start!”

With those words, the Yamai sisters and Four Heavenly Kings kicked the floor.

Even still, if they don’t do something to the crowd in front of the store, there is no way they could reach their hands on the bread.

“Kaguya! Yuzuru! Plan A!”

When Shido gave them an instruction from the outer edge of the battlefield, Kaguya and Yuzuru gave him a thumbs-up without facing back.

“Preparation. Kaguya!”

“Right!”

Yuzuru joined her hands, Kaguya then used that as a foothold for her jump.

Seeing that, Washitani, who was running in parallel with them, twisted the corner of his lip.

“Fu, isn’t that exactly the same as before!”

He used the back of a nearby student as a foothold and jumped to Kaguya.

“Secret Arts – Icarus Fa —”

“Now! Yuzuru!”

Shido raised his voice when Washitani tried to hit Kaguya mid-air with his body.

“Affirmative. I understand.”

Suddenly Yuzuru who is kneeling down to the floor started running and jumped into the air —

“Attack. Eiya”

With that unexcited voice, Yuzuru kicked up her right leg — toward Washitani’s stomach.

“Augh...?!”

Washitani yelled in anguish, however, their attack didn’t stop there.

“Kuku... time for your fall, former king.”

Kaguya twisted her body mid-air and performed an axe kick toward the back of Washitani’s head.

Washitani’s body that is receiving both kick up and axe kick at the same time spinning down, and stuck to the floor. His feet cramped up a little.

“Ku... Washitani is defeated?!”

“Wha... B-but don’t get carried away! Washitani is the weakest of us Four Heavenly Kings!”

Said that, <Pickpocket> Saginuma then made a kinda refreshing face. Seems like she always wanted to say that line.

However, they still cannot let down their guard. There are still two of the Four Heavenly Kings left.

“Take this! My death scent!”

<Professor> Karasuma spread out his coat and put several test tubes between his fingers on both hands.

Seeing his actions, Shido raised his voice.

“You two! Plan B!”

’!!’

Kaguya and Yuzuru, who have landed on the floor, immediately equipped the goggles hanging on their waist after hearing Shido’s words.

When the surroundings began to be scented with the pungent smell, other students started to frown their faces. However, the Yamai sisters kept calm as if nothing happened. Of course, the goggles on their faces are the type that covered their noses, like the one used for diving.

“What...!”

Karasuma raised a voice brimming with confusion and changed his face into astonishment.

The Yamai sisters closed on Karasuma and snatched those test tubes emitting the smell from his hands —

“Kuku, if you like the smell that much...”

“Laughter. We will let you smell it forever.”

They then made a devilish smile and poured the liquid in the test tube onto his neck.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaa?!”

After screaming in such agony, Karasuma collapsed down to the floor. The pungent smell in the surrounding area got even stronger.

“Aw...”

Shido frowned in pity. Even though he doesn’t know what that liquid is composed of, the smell would probably remain for quite some time.

“Ku... you two! How miserable! If it had come to this then I —”

Sagnuma said, trying to sneak up on the Yamai sisters.

However, the two simply stared her down, and she stopped right away.

The reason was simple.

Yesterday, when Shido explained the plans for the encounter with the Four Heavenly Kings to the two, Sagnuma’s was the simplest one.

To explain it simply...”just try to not get robbed.”

Pickpocketing the bread requires one to be caught off-guard. Thus, if the Yamai sisters simply pay attention to that, the success rate will drop dramatically.

Now, no one will get in the way of the Yamais. They hold the 500 yen coin in their hand and walk to the front of the store, pushing aside the students. But —

“Washitani! Attack <Dispel>!”

Once Saginuma’s voice was heard from the back, Washitani, who was supposed to be crouching down to the floor, held him from his back.

“What...!”

Kaguya and Yuzuru turned back, noticing Shido’s voice and distorting their faces in horror.

When Saginuma saw their faces, she made a vicious smile.

“That’s right. It is <Dispel> who is giving them the instructions. We should be attacking him instead. — Karasuma!”

Being led by Saginuma’s calling, Karasuma, who was drifting with a stinking smell, rose up.

“Ku... kiki... now that it has come to this, I will soak everything in this stinking smell! I wonder if you can stay no reaction when I rub you in the face, ‘No Reaction’ <Dispel>!”

He said that (with a twang) and approached Shido like a zombie. Every step he took caused the stinking smell to assault Shido.

“U-uwaaaaaa!”

Shido couldn’t resist, and shouted.

“You all...!”

“Anger. How dirty.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru distorted their faces in anger. However, they are already surrounded by other students. Even though they wanted to return to Shido, no doubt Shido would get hugged by <Professor> before they could get back to him.

“Hey, you should also become as smelly as me!”

“Uwa! E-EEK...”

’Shido!’

The moment Kaguya and Yuzuru simultaneously shouted Shido’s name.

“Eh — ?”

A gust of wind blew all over the surroundings.

After a moment of floating, the view before Shido's eyes started spinning and his body was slammed into the wall. The next moment, a dull pain ran through his body.

"Aww..."

He opened his eyes.

The view before him is a very strange one.

Centered from Kaguya and Yuzuru who were taking each other's hands, the students all collapsed down to the floor. The bread is all blown away and there are a few broken windows.

Seems like some of their Spirit powers that had been sealed flowed back to them in response to their intensity of emotion. After all, they were originally a Spirit of wind who caused a lot of casualties around the world.

"Are you okay, Shido?"

"Worry. Are you okay?"

They both walked to Shido then removed their goggles and started smelling Shido's body. They then reached out their hands to Shido with relief.

"Ha... haa... thanks."

Shido stood up with their help and said with a wry smile.

However, for them right now, they have an even more important thing to do. Once they shook their shoulders, they ran to the school store.

"Store lady, please give us the limited bread!"

"Petition. Please do."

Even though the Four Heavenly Kings were still conscious, it seems like they can't stand up right now. They looked at the Yamai sisters' orders, frustrated.

That was the moment of victory. Shido gripped his fist tight, but—

"I'm sorry, but the limited bread on the shelf was all blown away just now."

The store lady said with as calm a voice as usual.

"W... what?!"

"Horror. That can't be..."

Kaguya and Yuzuru looked around their surroundings and slumped their shoulders.

The Four Heavenly Kings who are still collapsing down to the floor then laughed weakly at their looks.

“Fu... fu... how unfortunate.”

“Kukiki, so it ended with a tie.”

“Kyahaha, then —”

Suddenly — The Four Heavenly Kings stopped laughing.

There is only one possible reason.

From the stairway, there is an approaching footsteps.

“D-don’t tell me...”

“This footsteps is —”

“<Miss Perfect> ...?!”

“Eh...?”

Hearing the voice of those three, Shido looked in the direction of those footsteps.

<Miss Perfect>. Shido remembered that name. Those three said she is the strongest of all Four Heavenly Kings.

And she — is now approaching here.

The footsteps come nearer and nearer, and her appearance could be seen.

That face is —

“...Origami?”

Shido said, frowning.

That’s right. The person coming down from the stairs is Tobiichi Origami.

“<Miss Perfect>!”

“It has been a long time...!”

”I never thought you’d appear...!”

However, the other Four Heavenly Kings looked up to her brimming with emotion. Seems like Shido did not mistake her for someone else, but Origami is actually the <Miss Perfect> those three said.

“Origami... you are the last of the Four Heavenly Kings?”

When Shido asked that, Origami let out her breath.

“They called me that on their own.”

“I see...”

Shido guessed the situation and smiled bitterly.

However, the Four Heavenly Kings didn’t notice Origami’s reaction and raised their voices trying to cling to her.

“Please, <Miss Perfect>!”

“Take revenge for us...!”

“If it were you... maybe you can do something even with this situation...!”

“...”

Origami ignored the words of those three and talked to the store lady.

“Pardon me.”

“Ah, here it is. The bread you reserved.”

Said that, the store lady then handed her bread (with a ‘LIMITED!’ clearly written on it) she kept on the back of the shelf.

’What...?!’

Shido, the Yamai sisters and even the Four Heavenly Kings were surprised.

“R-reservation...?”

“Amazement. I never thought you could do that...”

Origami simply walked past the Yamai sisters, limited bread in her hands.

However, the Four Heavenly Kings recovered earlier than them and, completely unlike earlier, laughed triumphantly.

“Fu-fuhahaha! Seems like us Four Heavenly Kings win this contest!”

“Ku-kukiki! That’s right! Have you seen the ability of <Miss Perfect>!”

“Kyahaha! Although it didn’t sound right to me, it certainly was our winning!”

Origami, not wanting to be involved with them, continued walking without making any reaction. Yamai sisters grind their teeth in disappointment.

“Damn, damn! Even though we put in that much effort...!”

“Bitter. Kaguya, please calm down. Let’s beat them next month.”

“...”

Seeing their reaction, Shido scratched his cheek.

For some reason, he’d feel annoyed if it ended like this.

“...Hey, Origami.”

That’s why Shido called her when Origami was going to walk past him.

“If it’s okay, can we have that bread...?”

“Why?”

“Well... a little bit of circumstances. It might not be worth it but, I will exchange my boxed lunch with —”

“Here.”

Before Shido could finish his sentence, Origami handed him the bread.

’... What?!’

The faces of the Four Heavenly Kings who were enjoying their victory immediately froze.

“Is it okay...?”

“Yes. In exchange.”

“S-sure, it is inside my bag. That’s now yours.”

“...”

Origami heard that and nodded without saying anything then skipped upstairs to the classroom.

“What... I can’t believe you could snatch the bread from <Miss Perfect>...”

The Four Heavenly Kings said in a confusing voice.

“As expected from the man who tumbled and evaded my mid-air attack and hit my crotch with your head one year ago...”

“So this means his ability to catch a cold in his nose in order to escape from my death scent was not just for show...!”

“I shouldn’t underestimate the man who made me pickpocket the dummy trash instead of the bread...!”

“...Isn’t that all a coincidence?”

So that’s why he has been given the nickname. Shido dropped his shoulders listlessly.

Few seconds later, Yuzuru and Kaguya, who finally understood what’s going on, ran to Shido.

“Shido! You did it!”

“Praise. You did it in the end.”

“Well, it’s kinda dirty play though.”

However, for the Yamai sisters, the fact that their comrade was able to get the bread is important. Kaguya hugged Shido with a broad smile and Yuzuru happily leaned herself toward him.

Shido made a bitter smile and handed the Rainbow Cream Bread to them.

“Good job. — Here, divide it between you two.”

’... ‘

However, the Yamai sisters who received the bread from him simply stared quietly at it, then took the bread from its package and divided it into three pieces.

They then gave the middle piece to Shido.

“Eh?”

“Kuku... I’m indebted for your work this time. Let me give you a reward.”

“Gratitude. Our winning is because of Shido. Please accept it.”

Shido was surprised for a moment... then raised the corner of his lip and accepted the bread.

“I see. As you wish, then.”

“Umu. What about a toast to our winning?”

“Consent. Let me borrow your hand.”

“Toast?”

While Shido is still inclining his head, Kaguya and Yuzuru simply touched their bread to the bread still in Shido’s hand.

Seeing Kaguya and Yuzuru’s satisfied looks, Shido bit into the bread.

Kurumi Star Festival

“It’s... really crowded here huh.”

Shido walked leisurely while looking at the streets on his left and right. Reflected in his eyes was the shopping district that was more lively than usual. That was to be expected, that’s because today is the seventh day of the seventh month. An annual festival known as Tanabata, shopkeepers who love holidays like these the most would of course not let such a chance to make a roaring business escape, they have already raised quite an excitement in the district long ago.

Open air stalls have long been set up on both sides of the street, not only were there takoyaki and yakisoba that are said to be indispensable in festivals, the various items on sale were also extremely appealing. There was no end to the flow of visitors, resulting in the entire district being packed with people. Shido was not the kind of person to feel excited from festivals, however it was different when he was placed in a location where there are stalls everywhere. Although the festive Spirit would not cause the price of the goods to fall, it will however cause the stall owners to start some off-record advertising that would be beneficial to those that visit.

Since the arrival of the gourmand Tohka, the cost of meals of the Itsuka residence have been under the subsidization of <Ratatoskr>, but the amount and quality of food aside, to resolve their daily meals at the lowest cost possible—as the sole person in charge of the Itsuka residence’s kitchen, that was Shido’s important mission. At this moment, Shido felt pitiful as he became aware that he was displaying an aura of a mature housekeeping husband...

However it is pointless for him to complain about it now. Shido let out his depressed feelings with a huge sigh, after which he revealed a face of that of a housewife that was just about to go and hunt for bargains in the district. It was an usual everyday event for Shido. After this Shido would only need to go to the stores that he commonly frequents as usual, chat with the enthusiastic storekeepers for a while before carrying the groceries back home and make dinner for the girls back home. —At least that was how it was supposed to be. However, at that moment.

“Eh—?”

At the edge of his vision, on the opposite side of the street, Shido spotted something out of the ordinary.

“Wha...”

At the same time, before his brain could register what that existence was, Shido’s body stiffened, as though he had been frozen to the spot. On the other side of the wide sea of people that filled the shopping district. A young girl wearing a black one-piece dress stood there. Long hair that

just happened to rest on her shoulders, a slender figure, the left side of her face was covered by her fringe akin to that of a waterfall, exposing her right eye that seemed to be unfathomable as a black hole as well as lips that were as delicate as sakura petals. With all that beauty, there was a devilish-like charm capable of enslaving men the moment eye contact was made.

However—that was not the case. The reason why Shido was so shocked to the point that he was unable to move for a few seconds, was not just because of the girl's looks.

“Kurumi—Tokisaki...?”

Shido said the girl's name with a shocked tone, at the same time, swallowing his saliva to relieve his dry throat. —Kurumi Tokisaki. The girl who had transferred into Shido's class roughly a month ago, who had also intended to [devour] Shido, the Spirit who had planned to take the power of the Spirits sealed inside of him for herself was the very girl in front of his eyes, Kurumi Tokisaki. Possessing a brutal and competitive personality, she was different from Tohka and Yoshino who unintentionally cause spacequakes which endangers human lives, Tokisaki Kurumi had killed countless humans out of her own free will... she was also known as—[the most dangerous Spirit].

Not too long ago she had lost her left arm and part of her Angel after suffering a hit from Kotori's attack, her whereabouts have been unknown since then. However the one in front of his eyes right now, her left arm was unharmed and intact.

“...Eh.”

Shido couldn't help but rub his eyes. It was probably just to reassure himself, but he had a small wish that he had seen wrongly. After that Shido blinked his eyes a few times, when he turned back to look at the street once more... The black figure of the girl was already gone.

“W-what's with that... so it was my imagination after all—”

“—Good evening, Shido-san.”

“Uwah?!”

Before Shido could even manage to heave a sigh of relief, a voice suddenly called out to him from behind, causing him to jump. After that, he hastily turned around, standing right there, was the girl who had been on the other side of the street just a few minutes before.

“Kurumi...?!”

“Yes, it has been a while, Shido-san.”

Saying that, Kurumi revealed an intoxicating smile, lifting her skirt slightly and bent her knees, she bowed to Shido. Shido on the other hand was forcing his erratic heartbeat to calm down, he firmly stared into Kurumi's visible right eye before inquiring.

“W-why are you... in a place like this?”

If he was maintaining contact with Kotori like he usually did, he would most likely be lectured for uttering such a pointless question. The corner of Kurumi's lips slowly rose, she gazed at Shido's face, replying to his question in a whisper.

“Isn't that obvious—I am here to meet with Shido-san of course.”

“...!”

Shido immediately held his breath, hastily stepping back at the same time. Kurumi came to meet Shido. That means— her goal is to... However, as a normal human of flesh and blood, it is impossible to escape from Kurumi's clutches, Shido understands this fact very well. Although there are humans as far as one could see surrounding the two of them, but to Kurumi who is a Spirit, she probably would not care about being seen by eyewitnesses. No... in the worst case scenario, if she wanted to, she could abduct everybody including Shido into the shadows, picking him out after that would be an extremely simple task. With his thoughts up to this point, Shido gritted his teeth as he looked back at Kurumi. Due to the irregular existence before his eyes, a normal everyday scene has now transformed into one with a bleak future with a blink of an eye. What exactly should he do to—

“...?”

But, at that moment, Kurumi suddenly reached out her arm, holding Shido's hand with her own.

“Fufu... hey, Shido-san?”

Kurumi's face had an enchanting smile, her fingers slowly wrapped around Shido's hand. That expression of hers, it was as though she had seen through Shido's thoughts, a chill went down his spine. Alas, he had tried everything he had, Shido thought to himself, faced with such a dire situation it looks like he was all out of options.

However—Kurumi said something that was entirely out of his expectations, as though ignoring the despair that had clouded Shido's heart.

“—May we go out on a date? Right now?”

Kurumi pulled on Shido's hand while moving her lips near his ear, she whispered to him.

“Ha...?”

Faced with this unexpected invitation, Shido couldn't help but widen his eyes.

"Kurumi, wh, what did you say just now...?"

"Fufu, really now Shido-san, requesting a girl to say such words a second time, you really are insensitive."

Saying that, Kurumi tilted her head mischievously to one side.

"A... date?"

"That's right, I just want to go out and play with Shido-san, can't I?"

"No, it's just..."

Shido was speechless. Kurumi had proactively invited him on a date. —From a normal viewpoint, this was an extremely dangerous situation. However, Shido was hesitant as well. He would be lying if he said that he was not afraid of Kurumi. After all she was a malicious Spirit who had murdered countless humans before, if she wished to decapitate Shido, it would be but a simple task for her to do so. Even so, deep down inside Shido's heart, there was a strong urge to converse with Kurumi once more, an urge to get her to confide in him. This feeling overrode his fear of death.

"..."

However, in response to Shido's silence, Kurumi seemed to have misinterpreted something.

"Ara ara, it seems that Shido-san is still doubting me... How lamentable, but it can't be helped. No matter who it is, they probably would not want to go on a date with someone who had attempted to kill them before. However—"

Midway through her sentence, Kurumi bent forward slightly, gazing up at Shido with a humble expression while continuing her words.

"Please be at ease, I came here with no intention of doing any harm to Shido-san for today. If you really do not trust me no matter what I do, it is alright to use chains to restrain my hands or even wrapping a bomb around my throat is fine too you know?"

"No no no, how could I do that to you..."

Upon noticing Shido's fluster, Kurumi widened her eyes as though she was acting in a play, she hid her face with her hands displaying a posture of dismay.

“Then that means, Shido-san just hates me and isn’t willing to go out with me? Sob sob, I’m so sad, I feel like I am going to cry.”

“Eh...! I said nothing of the sort!”

“Waa—”

“Hey hey hey...”

Shido scratched the back of his head with a troubled expression. It was obvious that Kurumi was acting suspiciously. Of course, in Kurumi’s case, she could very well be just playing a prank on him... But for some reason, the atmosphere that Kurumi was currently giving out was somehow different from that of the most dangerous Spirit he had met weeks before.

Furthermore... Kurumi did say before that she has no intention of harming Shido today. It was only a verbal promise, she could go back on her word at any time, there was no way to ascertain that she would keep her promise. However, for as long as Shido could remember, although Kurumi’s words often had a hidden meaning behind them, she would occasionally speak in a roundabout way but she has never gone back on her word before.

Most importantly, the current situation still remains extremely dangerous for him, if he were to reject her invitation now, making her unhappy, that would spell digging his own grave. Before he could even utter “I’m sorry.”, he probably would have been dragged into the shadows by several arms.

“...Alright then, I’ll go on a date with you.”

Once Shido said that, Kurumi’s expression instantly brightened.

“Really?”

Kurumi’s feelings of jubilation could be felt from not just her expressions but her words as well, just like a blooming flower that had nothing to hide, Shido couldn’t help but be surprised at this. Although he had already thought up some countermeasures for the various situations that may happen... but he was at a loss upon witnessing her behaving like this.

“Fufu, I’m so happy, Shido-san really is a gentle person.”

Kurumi happily chirped while reaching out and hugging Shido’s arm.

“Wah! K-Kurumi?! Wh...”

The sudden turn of events, caused Shido to cry out in surprise, blushing furiously like a maiden in love. Despite the fact that she was the most dangerous Spirit, Kurumi still looked like a frail

girl. If she made such a bold action all of a sudden, as a healthy highschool boy, how could Shido handle her?

“Um, I say, isn’t this a little too intimate...?”

“Is that so?”

However, Kurumi merely smiled at Shido’s fluster, sticking closer to Shido.

“I don’t see any problem—, after all we are on a date right now. Fufu, for the moment... only for this moment, Shido-san is my man. Or are you saying... that you are feeling disgusted, with me hugging your arm like this?”

Kurumi asked in a depressed voice, this caused an unexplainable sense of guilt to form in Shido’s heart, he couldn’t help but groan as he frowned.

“That’s not it, I won’t push you away...”

“Is that so? Fufu, then let’s hurry up and go.”

Saying that, Kurumi started walking ahead. Under the lead of her petite figure, Shido was half-pulled into the bustling streets.

—Tanabata. Just like Hikoboshi and Orihime who are separated by the vast Milky Way. Wading through the wide streets, weaving past the dense human crowd— The youth and the maiden, finally meet once more.

“...Umm, Kurumi. You said that this was a date, but where on earth are we headed?”

After walking for an unknown period of time, Shido finally couldn’t help but open his mouth and inquire.

“Hm, actually there’s a place that I’d like to visit.”

“A place that you’d like to go? Where?”

“Fufu, I’m keeping it a secret for now.”

At the same time, Kurumi did not forget to put her finger to her lips. Witnessing Kurumi making such a cute action, Shido felt his heart flutter. However at this juncture, he immediately reminded himself. Although this chance to interact with Kurumi could be a rare opportunity, her danger level did not decrease due to this. Being with her means that a moment of carelessness could very well mean instant death. Just as Shido was contemplating this, Kurumi who was dragging

Shido suddenly stopped in her footsteps. Following that, she showed a cunning smile, the tip of her tongue circled her lips, her eyes were directed straight at Shido.

“—Aaah, aaah. Sure looks... delicious.”

“...!!”

Those words caused Shido's wariness to rise.

“What... don't tell me, you really intend to—”

His voice trembling in fear, Shido tried to pull away from Kurumi. However Kurumi's arms were akin to chains, refusing to let go of Shido for even a single millimeter.

“Ah, ah—”

Kurumi chuckled, her lips forming a crescent, she then pointed her finger—at the open-air stall behind Shido. The stall was selling snacks named [Bamboo Leaf Cakes]. Within these bite- sized cakes, fillings such as red bean paste or cream were added. It did seem very appealing.

“Hey, Shido-san. Don't you think that that looks delectable as well?”

“Eh? So you were referring to... c-cake...?”

“—Oh my, what in the world did you think I was talking about?”

Shido's expression instantly relaxed. Upon witnessing his strange reaction, she couldn't help but giggle... haa, it somehow feels like he was a clown in Kurumi's hands.

“I-I'm telling you...”

“Fufufu, but it really makes you hungry, right? Just look, there are so many weird things everywhere. That one over there seems to be called [Milky Way Shaved Ice].”

Shido looked in the direction Kurumi indicated. There was indeed a stall that was selling shaved ice with Blue Hawaii syrup with condensed milk on top.

“Ahh... so that's how it is, so that's their representation of the Milky Way, it is rather creative.”

“Look, the [Orihime Cotton Candy].”

“Linking cotton candy with cloth weaving? This one seems a little forced...”

“That one over there seems to be [Hikoboshi's Beef Jerky].”

“This... a cowherd shouldn't be eating beef.”

Merchants are really pulling out all the stops, Shido frowned, sweat formed on his cheek. Kurumi put her hand to her mouth, showing a slight smile.

“Fufu, being together with Shido-san like this, really makes me happy.”

“No, I’m not really doing...”

However, without even waiting for him to finish, Kurumi once again towed Shido at his elbow.

“Let’s go this way, Shido-san.”

“Wah, Kurumi, don’t pull me!”

“Fufufu, time waits for no one don’t you know? Come on, Shido-san. Let’s treasure the short period of time we have together.”

Kurumi walked on with a smiling face, with Shido right behind her, they weaved through the shopping district. Following that for another fifteen minutes on foot, Kurumi pointed at the building in front and spoke to Shido.

“This is the place.”

“This place is... oh, the planetarium?”

That’s right, in front of the two was the planetarium that was located slightly further away from the shopping district.

“Yes, I’ve been longing to have a look for a long time now.”

“Is that so... This is rather unexpected.”

“Ara, what do you mean?”

“Ah, no...”

Shido was in the middle of thought as to what excuse to make before making a sudden realization—he was shocked at himself for being relaxed enough to be able to joke around with Kurumi. No, he probably did not let down his guard at all.

However, from the shopping district to this point, he did not feel any feelings of hostility or violence from Kurumi at all, this somehow caused him to lose his sense of wariness. That’s right, the Kurumi today is really just a normal girl. Happily linking arms whilst engaging in conversation, smiling in bliss... all those normal activities.

Such normality—being together for such a short period of time, had caused Shido to forget the bloody struggle last month.

“...”

Shido wordlessly focused on Kurumi... He has no idea what is going on in her mind. Is she planning on [consuming] Shido once he lets down his guard? But if that was the case, what kind of motive does Kurumi have to do this in such a roundabout way? She would only have to pull him into the shadows the instant their eyes met to achieve that goal. If that was the case, then why? She couldn't have really been just hoping for a date...? No, that way of thinking would be even more foolish. Since she made contact with Shido knowing full well that she may be discovered by <Ratatoskr>, then she must have some goal in mind—

“...? Shido-san? What's the matter?”

“Ah... it's nothing. Let's go in, Kurumi.”

Shido hid his hesitant feelings from Kurumi, walking into the planetarium together. Purchasing two tickets, they located their seats and sat down. Not long after the lights in the planetarium went out, the guide's voice resonated in the darkness.

“—We're very thankful for your presence in the planetarium today. Our program for today is—”

After the scripted greetings, on top of the semi-circle dome ceiling, countless stars began to shine.

“Wow...”

A voice of amazement sounded out from beside him, Shido couldn't resist moving his vision from the ceiling to the source. Next to him, Kurumi's eyes were shining with a glittering sparkle, she did not avert her gaze, staring at the countless dazzling stars above her in a daze.

“...”

Upon witnessing her innocence, Shido scratched his cheek... giving out a small sigh, before returning his gaze to the ceiling... He could see the stars and yet he could not understand Kurumi's real feelings. Leaving Shido's sense of helplessness aside, the countless stars in the sky banded together, forming a magnificent tapestry of light—this was the Milky Way. On both sides, there were two other stars that gave off a brilliance that outshone the other stars.

[—The daughter of the Heavenly Emperor who lived by the bank of the Amanogawa, Orihime, was a celestial maiden that was able to weave beautiful clothes. However, after she married Hikoboshi the Cow Herder, Orihime no longer wove cloth, spending the whole day playing with Hikoboshi. The Heavenly Emperor was incensed when he saw this and separated the two in

order for them to focus on their work. From then on, the two lovers are only allowed to meet each other once a year, on the night of the seventh day of the seventh month. However if it rains on that day, then the Amanogawa would flood and they would be unable to cross—]

So that was what it was, narrating the origin of Tanabata, it does seem fitting of the festive mood. Shido stealthily peeked to his right once more, yet he was caught off guard by Kurumi's eyes meeting his.

“—!”

“...Fufu.”

Shido couldn't help but feel his heart jump, however Kurumi did not seem to notice as she revealed a bright smile, she silently overlapped Shido's hand with hers. The back of his hand was enveloped in a soft yet cool sensation, Shido's heart skipped a beat.

“K-Kurumi...?”

He wanted to ask her a question, but her gaze had already returned to the starry ceiling. Kurumi paid no heed to Shido's fluster, slowly parting her soft lips.

“Hey—Shido-san.”

“W-what is it...?”

“Hikoboshi and Orihime, they are separated by the Milky way, only allowed to meet once a year, is that right?”

“...Yeah, that's correct.”

“However, if it rains on Tanabata, then this once in a year opportunity would be lost.”

“Yeah... there are a lot of interpretations regarding this... but this is true for most myths.”

Hearing Shido's words, Kurumi took a shallow breath as though thinking of something before continuing to speak.

“If... and only if, one year, another year and the year after that... if rain continues to fall on Tanabata, the Amanogawa that separates the two will continue to flood... then the two lovers, are they still able to continue to think of each other?”

“Eh...?”

Faced with such a sudden question, Shido couldn't help but tilt his head in wonder.

“Why the sudden question?”

“Time is more gentle than anything. Even though the two of them will lose this once in a year opportunity to meet, that sadness will heal as time passes. However time is also more cruel than any other, even though the two lovers have pledged their love for all eternity, that pure emotion will fade away into dust in the flow of time. That one instant where their existence is recognized by each other is being constantly taken away by fate, just how long will the lover that resides in their heart exist till?”

“That really is... a difficult question to answer.”

Shido’s face took on a troubled expression as he replied, there was no correct answer when it came to this type of question.

However, Kurumi did not back down as she continued to look at Shido, it was as though she was waiting for Shido to give her an answer. That serious gaze of hers, made Shido slightly afraid.

“Gah—... Kurumi?”

“Yes.”

“I’m not Hikoboshi nor Orihime. What I am going to say next, I hope you will take it as my personal opinion.”

“Alright.”

“I think that they will probably never forget each other.”

Hearing his statement, Kurumi curiously tilted her head in his direction.

“Why would you think of it that way?”

“Just think about it, the two of them forget about their work because their relationship was so good, resulting in their separation right? If it weren’t some disastrous issue, how could they forget themselves?”

“...Is that so.”

Kurumi’s melancholic reply had a sigh mixed in. It seems that this reply did not make her satisfied.

However, Shido was not done speaking, he shook his head and continued.

“Don’t be hasty, I have proof of what I just said.”

“Proof... you say?”

“That’s right. I think... The two of them are actually constantly meeting in secret.”

“Huh?”

Kurumi was caught off guard as she widened her eyes.

“What do you mean by that? Aren’t the two of them being separated by the Amanogawa?”

“No, if you think about it, Hikoboshi—also known as the Cow Herder Star’s other name is Aquila— it’s the alpha star of the Eagle constellation. Since it’s an eagle, it will just fly across the Amanogawa just by flapping its wings. The two of them must be meeting secretly behind the Heavenly Emperor’s back. Therefore, how would they forget about each other.”

“...”

Hearing Shido’s words, Kurumi was speechless as she widened her eyes for a moment—

“He, hehe... haha, ahahahaha.”

Not long after, she began to laugh uncontrollably. It was not the gentle, discreet giggle that she had used till now but a loud laughter. Irritation started to show from the surroundings in the form of coughs, glares of complaint stabbed at the two of them like needles. Despite all of this, Kurumi continued to laugh.

“Um... Kurumi, I think it’s better if we left first, alright?!”

Saying that, Shido helped Kurumi to stand up. Although Kurumi was still in bursts of laughter, she still obediently listened to Shido’s suggestion. As Shido repeatedly bowed his head in apology to the visitors around them, he led Kurumi out of the dark hall.

“Haa—... Fufu, that was really funny. I understand now... indeed, Shido-san does have a point.”

“...Actually I had no intention of making you laugh. Since you are done, then shall we go back in again?”

At Shido’s inquiry, Kurumi however shook her head from side to side.

“It is enough. This aside—I wish to write on tanzaku. By writing my wish on that and hanging it on a bamboo shoot, it will come true, is that correct?”

“Although I don’t know how true that is... Hm, tanzaku huh, If that’s the case, then let’s go to the shopping district, there’s massive bamboo planted there. Tanzaku are distributed for free as well, shall we go together?”

“Yes, I can’t wait.”

Kurumi showed an adorable smile, hugging tightly onto Shido’s arm once more.

“Hey, hey...”

Shido wanted to resist for an instant... however he immediately realized that such resistance was futile, thus he let Kurumi hold on to his arm as they left the planetarium together. Following that, they walked back onto the route that they came from. Looking at his watch after leaving the building, the time had just passed six in the evening. The sky has started to take on a crimson hue, the shadows of the two were drawn out on the ground...

It’s going to be dinner time soon, the hungry Tohka must be ranting for dinner at the Itsuka residence already. But it is impossible for him to escape from Kurumi at present. Most importantly—regarding the present Kurumi and the one he had met last time, Shido was unable to leave her be. Just as they were about to turn into the shopping district, Kurumi suddenly cried out in surprise, stopping in her tracks.

“Gah... what’s the matter?”

“Shido-san, look at that”

Shido looked in the direction indicated by Kurumi. Over there, was a small wedding store, on the signboard had the words [Try on a wedding gown free!] written on it.

“I’ve always wanted to try one. Before we go back to the shopping district, may we go there and take just a little peek?”

“This is... but I’m still a high school student. Then again why are you suddenly so interested in that sort of thing...”

“...”

Hearing Shido say that, Kurumi suddenly looked crestfallen, showing a lonesome expression.

“...That’s because I wish to have more memories with Shido-san. At the same time—I hoped that Shido-san would be able to take away memories of being with me as well.”

“Eh?”

Hearing Kurumi say words that did not sound like her at all, Shido couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow.

“...Can’t we, please?”

“Guh...”

Looking at Kurumi’s moist eyes, Shido couldn’t find it in his heart to say no to her.

“I, I got it already. Then let’s just ask them. If they refuse, then you have to give up, alright?”

“! Yes, yes! I’m so happy!”

Kurumi’s expression instantly brightened up. That pure and innocent look, caused Shido to lose all intention of resisting, he had no choice but to walk to the wedding store with Kurumi.

“Shido-san... where are you?”

It was evening. Under the twilight glow, Yoshino was currently walking through the shopping district. The small figure of the girl was hidden under the straw hat’s large brim. Her two sapphire blue pupils as well as the funny looking rabbit puppet on her left hand [Yoshinon] were her key features.

“Yeah, that’s right, did something happen to him...”

“Hmph, he’s probably mulling over what to make for dinner in front of the stalls. Let’s find him quickly and go home.”

As though they were replying to Yoshino’s outspoken thoughts, the two girls walking in front of her spoke. One of the girls had hair as dark as night, a girl with crystal-like eyes—Tohka. The other girl had her hair tied into two ponytails with black ribbons, having a haughty expression—Kotori. That’s correct, originally dinner was supposed to be at the Itsuka residence, but Shido who had left earlier to buy dinner ingredients has yet to return and is unable to be contacted. As such Yoshino as well as Tohka and Kotori who were worried set out together to the shopping district to find him.

“Hm?”

All of a sudden, Tohka’s eyebrow twitched, she patted Kotori on the shoulder and asked.

“Kotori, Kotori.”

“Hm? What is it? Have you found Shido already?”

“No, I haven’t... I just wanted to know, what is that?”

Saying that, Tohka pointed in the direction of the street. Over there, numerous bamboo were placed alongside the street. For some reason, the branches of the bamboo had countless strips of paper attached onto them.

“Oh... Those are wishing tanzaku. That means that today is Tanabata.”

“Tanzaku? Tanabata?”

“Yeah. Tanabata’s custom is to write your wishes onto strips of paper called Tanzaku and hang them on the bamboo, then your wishes would be granted.”

“! Wh, what did you say...!”

Hearing Kotori’s explanation, Tohka’s eyes started to glow.

“Ko... Kotori!”

“...Alright alright, it’s okay, you can go and give it a try.”

“Y-yeah!”

Kotori expressed her approval as though she had seen through everything, Tohka on the other hand, nodded her head vigorously before running to the bamboo. Looking at Tohka’s figure, Kotori turned her gaze towards Yoshino.

“If that’s the case, then Yoshino should go as well.”

“Eh... I-I can go too...?”

“Yeah, of course. Although it’s a different case altogether whether it will come true or not, since this comes once a year, you should go and experience it for yourself.”

“Al, alright...!”

As such, Yoshino followed Kotori to the main street, retrieving two free tanzaku, taking up the organizer’s pen, and she wrote down her wish alongside [Yoshinon].

“Oooh, what did everyone wish for?”

At this point, Tohka who had finished writing her wish a step ahead of the others sneaked a peek at Kotori’s tanzaku.

“...Uh!”

At that, Kotori went into a fluster, hastily rubbing off the wish that was half- finished.

“Uh? What’s wrong, Kotori.”

“It’s, it’s nothing. I wrote it wrong, just a mistake.”

Kotori said a vague line as she began to rewrite her wish in the space that was left.

“Hm? This wish seems a bit different from just now?”

“! It’s just your imagination! R-right, Yoshino’s done too right?! Let’s hurry and put these up and find Shido!”

“Hm? Oh, ooh…”

“O-okay…”

Tohka and Yoshino hurriedly nodded their heads after succumbing to Kotori’s pressure. After everyone had written their wishes down on their tanzaku, they made their way through the crowd.

“Phew… But, it’s going to take a lot of effort to find Shido in this crowd. There’s no other way then, let’s split up and search. I’ll go to the north section of the street, Tohka will go to the south, Yoshino will circle around the area to search. If you still haven’t found him in 30 minutes, come back here to regroup, understand?”

“Yeah, I got it!”

“O, okay… We understand.”

[OK—Leave it to us—!]

Tohka, Yoshino as well as [Yoshinon] nodded their heads.

“Good… then, let the searching start!”

At Kotori’s signal, the three girls plus one rabbit went off into their respective search zones. Yoshino’s area was the commercial district on the boundary of the shopping district. Compared to the large street, there’s less human traffic here, there’s a lesser chance of bumping into people distributing tissue papers or passers-by. Kotori must have thought about this beforehand for Yoshino’s sake. After silently thanking Kotori, Yoshino started to look for Shido.

“…Shido-san, I hope you didn’t get into any trouble.”

Yoshino said to herself. However at this point, [Yoshinon] on her left hand suddenly laughed

“Oo—hohoho”.

[Well—danger aside—he could very well have run into that, you know—?]

“That…?”

[I'm talking about women—Women. Ah—Shido-kun is a sex maniac!]

Saying that, [Yoshinon] covered its face with both hands, twisting its body while acting shy. Yoshino showed a bitter smile, but before she could reply [Yoshinon]—

“Eh...?”

The next instant, she widened her eyes, standing rooted to the spot. The reason for that was simple. She saw Shido and a girl whom she did not recognize together on the street.

“T-that was...”

[It's Shido-kun—Uhwoo—What a girl! Shido-kun really is something!]

“H-how can this be...”

Yoshino's voice started to tremble. Shido and the girl walked straight towards a building. —That place was a wedding store.

“Eh...?!”

[Hyuuuu—]

Yoshino did not understand the full details, but she had heard previously that marriage was the act of two people pledging their love for each other forever and living with each other under one roof. —Don't tell me, Shido-san really...?

“...Uu.”

Yoshino held her breath, sneaking around behind corners while inching closer to the store that the two had entered. Peeking inwards from the entrance into the building she saw Shido negotiating with the receptionist about something, the girl on the other hand was waiting behind him. Black silk-like hair, perfect features, this girl was beautiful to the point of making her feel frightened.

“Shi-Shido-san... Why are you here?”

“...Ara?”

Just as Yoshino was focusing on this girl in bewilderment, the girl noticed Yoshino's gaze, walking towards her.

“Good evening, do you want something from me?”

“Hyi...”

Suddenly being engaged in a conversation by a stranger caused the timid Yoshino to jump. However, now wasn't the time to be afraid, Yoshino gathered all the courage that she had and opened her trembling mouth.

"U, um... Can I ask what your relationship is with Shido-san..."

Hearing Yoshino mention Shido's name made the girl widen her eyes in surprise.

"You know Shido-san? Ara...? Then again, did I meet you somewhere...?"

The girl mumbled to herself while in thought, slightly nodding her head a few times after a while.

"...?"

"Aaah, don't mind me. Besides, don't you want to know what sort of relationship... Shido-san and I are in?"

"Ye... yeah..."

Yoshino lightly nodded, at that the girl's mouth had a hint of an evil smile.

"Regarding this, how should I put this? I guess it would be like destiny that can't be severed, a passion that cannot be separated... In conclusion, it's a special relationship that cannot be interfered with by anyone, huh?"

"Eh? Eh...?"

The girl's words made Yoshino go into shock. However the girl continued to speak while enjoying Yoshino's reaction.

"I know everything there is to know about Shido-san including every inch of his body, that's because I have carefully inspected him thoroughly just like licking him all over. Aaah... That time when we met last month, what a passionate night that was. Just as I was confiding in Shido, a burning object entered my body... Fufufu, I'll have to make him take responsibility for that."

"T-that..."

"Aaah, that's right. The underwear that I'm wearing right now was also picked for me by Shido-san himself. If you don't mind, do you want to have a look?"

Saying that, the girl pinched the edges of her skirt, slowly lifting them upwards.

"...?!"

Yoshino's mind went blank, the world began to spin, she did not give herself time to think, her legs had already taken her away.

"Fufufu, good day to you then."

The girl bemusedly called out, but Yoshino did not have any strength to turn her head. She did not have time to sort out her thoughts, she only thought of leaving this place as soon as possible.

"Somehow... this makes one feel uneasy..."

Shido said to himself, whilst adjusting his tie in the changing room located within the wedding store. This can't be helped, for men who were going to wear a white tuxedo for the first time in their life, most of them would probably think the same thing as well. That's right, in conclusion, although Shido and Kurumi are lovers in highschool, they have received permission to try out the wedding gown.

No, to put it across more accurately, from the beginning, the female receptionist had a troubled expression on her face, however after Kurumi whispered something to her, she immediately had a change in attitude, becoming extremely cooperative. In short... She even allowed him to try out the white tuxedo.

"That girl, what on earth did she say...?"

Shido heaved a huge sigh—suddenly remembering something.

"Ah... then that means, I can use my handphone!"

Being led around by Kurumi all this time made Shido's thinking slow. Shido took out his handphone from his clothes on the hanger, opening it, he noticed the numerous missed calls displayed on the screen. It seems that he had made his family worried.

"In any case, let's just call Kotori first..."

However, just as Shido was about to send a message over, the door of the changing room opened with a bang, the receptionist who had been sitting in the waiting rushed in.

"Come on hurry up, the bride has already finished preparing! May the groom proceed here!"

Saying that, she enthusiastically pulled Shido's hand.

"Wah, hold on?"

Shido who was caught off guard couldn't even resist, he was dragged out of the room without even being able to make a call. Just like that he was led through the corridor, all the way till the door of another changing room did the receptionist let go of his arm.

"Come, please enter."

"Ah, um..."

Shido listlessly replied, raising his hand to open the door.

"__"

Kurumi who was standing right in the center of the changing room entered his sights, Shido was instantly rendered speechless. Contrary to her usual image, a pure white wedding gown enveloped her lithe body, a thin layer of makeup covered her face—in the presence of such astounding beauty, Shido was unable to come up with any words.

"Fufu... being stared at like this, I'll get embarrassed as well."

"! Ah, this... s-sorry. That was because you were... you are, really too beautiful."

"Is that so, I appreciate the compliment."

As soon as Shido replied, Kurumi's face took on a pale pink shade, showing a graceful smile. For some reason, the staff member behind him keeps sniffing from an overflow of emotions, at the same time taking out her handkerchief and dabbing at her eyes.

"...Hey, Kurumi, what did you say to her?"

"Aaah, that miss over there? Nothing much, I only said 'I don't have long to live due to a terminal disease. I'm afraid that I won't last till the age that we would be able to swear to spend our lives together. She was so regretful of that fact, that she wanted to let me have the chance to wear a wedding gown at least, with that she became extremely caring...'"



“...Wait, isn’t all of that a lie?”

“Fufufu, I wonder?”

Shido pointed with judging eyes, however Kurumi merely laughed. At this, the female receptionist who was still weeping loudly sniffed a few times, she started to urge Shido and Kurumi.

“Alright alright, please proceed to the wedding hall, we provide photo taking as well.”

“Eh... No, no need, it’s enough for us.”

“What are you saying! This could be... it could be her last chance...!”

After crying out, the staff member used her handkerchief to cover her face as she wept uncontrollably. It seems that she’s the type that will be easily brought to tears.

“Isn’t it fine like this, Shido-san. Furthermore I too... wish to take a wedding photo together with Shido-san.”

“...Uu, um—”

Is this really okay... Although Shido was hesitant, he couldn’t very well say

“It’s all a lie”

At this point of time, more importantly, there’s no reason to refuse Kurumi’s wish just because of this reason alone. As such, under the urging of the receptionist, Shido and Kurumi both went through the corridor.

After stepping out from the building’s rear door, they reached a wide area that looked like a courtyard. This was a quiet area that was away from the hustle and bustle of the city. And in the centre, a church was built. Under the illumination of the setting evening sun, the entire space looked like it was being painted with a vermilion glow. Although it was small, it was a church that had been carefully maintained.

Opening the chocolate colored door, the crimson carpet extended all the way to the interior of the church with rows of long benches on both sides, what entered their eyes soon after was the altar that was placed inside the church, the huge crucifix as well as the brilliance of the stained glass windows.

“Come! Please stand in front of the altar! Leave the photo taking to me!”

“O-oh, thank you.”

“Fufufu, we’re leaving it to you then.”

A digital single lens reflex camera was in the hands of the staff, under her instructions, Shido and Kurumi stood side by side in front of the altar.

“Well then, will the two please face over here. A little closer, groom, please smile!”

“Ha, haha...”

After being pointed out, Shido made a half-hearted smile. At the same time, his ear heard the snapping sound of the shutter. Not knowing how long she had run after leaving the store, Yoshino accidentally ran into something soft.

“Kya...!”

“Yoshino? What’s wrong, why are you so flustered?”

Looks like she ran into Tohka. Tohka looked at Yoshino, tilting her head in wonder.

“To-Tohka... san. Shido, san... is going...”

“Uh? Did something happen to Shido?”

Looking at the panting Yoshino, the young maiden—Tohka frowned slightly.

“Y-yeah... actually...”

When Yoshino finally calmed down, she started to reiterate to Tohka what she saw just now.

“W-what...? Shido is going to marry a girl who flipped her skirt...?”

Tohka raised her eyebrows in confusion. However this was unavoidable, since Yoshino who witnessed the scene too had difficulty in understanding what she just saw. At this moment.

“Ah... Tohka, Yoshino. How was it at your end? Did you find Shido?”

Just as the two girls were looking at each other helplessly, Kotori met up with them as well.

“Ohhh, Kotori. Actually, Yoshino seemed to have found Shido...”

“! Really? Where did you see him?”

“Hm, speaking of this, it seems that Shido flipped the skirt of a cute girl, they spent a passionate night together, so now he’s being asked to take responsibility by marrying her or something.”

“Ah...?”

Hearing Tohka's words, Kotori was instantly rendered speechless. However in the next instant, her cheeks blushed red, rage was evident from her countenance.

"Ar... Are you kidding me! S-Shido getting married?! Wh, w-w-what on earth is going on?!"

"I'm, I'm not too sure as well..."

"What kind of joke is this! Where did this vixen come from! How dare she seduce my onii-chan!"

Kotori yelled aloud, repeatedly stomping the ground. After that she threw a sharp glare at Yoshino. That demonic expression made Yoshino cry out in terror.

"Where are they, Yoshino! Lead the way!"

"O-okay...!"

Although Tohka's explanation was slightly different from what she said earlier... But no matter, the current situation still requires the assistance of the two. Yoshino, along with Tohka and Kotori, sprinted back to the way she came from. After the photo shoot, the two of them got changed, leaving the wedding store behind them. At this time the surroundings have already taken on the color of dusk. That being said, he couldn't just leave Kurumi with just that. The special date that Kurumi had requested was still not completely over. That's right, Shido is currently walking on the dark road of the shopping district alongside Kurumi in order to fulfill her wish of writing on tanzaku.

"..."

Shido silently glanced at Kurumi who was walking beside him. Kurumi was delicately hugging the photo that was given to them from the wedding store (Furthermore, it really looked like a real wedding photo, expensive interleaving paper was used—and it was all for free), at the same time she was happily humming to a tune. After that, she would occasionally open the paper, sneaking a peek at the wedding photo of the two and showing a delighted smile...

The current Kurumi, made Shido even more confused. She was the most dangerous Spirit known, a girl who everyone should be wary of. However, at least Kurumi right now, no matter how you look at it, seems like she only wants to have a date with Shido today.

"Ah, Shido-san, please look over there."

As though stopping Shido from thinking too much, Kurumi spoke to him.

"Hm...?"

Hearing that, Shido raised his head. He saw many thick bamboo stalks placed alongside the stores of the shopping district, the leaves extending towards the night sky. There were already countless tanzaku hung on the branches, creating a colourful sight.

“Wah, that really looks beautiful.”

“Yeah... Look, they seem to be giving out tanzaku there. Didn’t you come over for that reason?”

“Yeah, I’ll just help myself then—Isn’t Shido-san going to write one too?”

“Eh, no, I’ll just...”

“It’s a rare chance after all, will you write it together with me?”

Kurumi gently smiled, taking Shido’s hand in hers. Just like that he was pulled by Kurumi, walking next to the bamboo. The dense number of bamboo leaves were just like a curtain. Long tables were placed below the bamboo to allow people to write their tanzaku more easily. Shido and Kurumi both took tanzaku from the staff members, after taking out pens from a makeshift pen holder from a plastic bottle with its top cut off, they started to think of what to write.

“A wish... huh.”

Although he did have wishes,... but when he wanted to write them down, he found it difficult to decide. As such, Shido naturally thought, what did the others write, at the same time he looked up.

“Hm...?”

Amongst the few tanzaku that he saw, a familiar name was seen. [I want to eat Katsu-karē for dinner tonight. Yatogami Tohka]

“That girl... when did she come here?”

Judging from that distinct handwriting, it was definitely written by Tohka herself. Shido scratched his cheek in suspicion, deciding in his heart—he will remember to buy ingredients for Katsu-karē on his way home. Following that, looking beside the tanzaku, he saw others. [I wish that I can speak to people in the eye. Yoshino] [I wish for Yoshino to be happy. Yoshinon]

“Haha...”

Looking at such heartwarming wishes, Shido couldn’t help but smile. It seems that Yoshino and [Yoshinon] came here with Tohka.

“Then, probably...”

Shido continued to look at other tanzaku. [I wish that Shido would be more useful. Kotori Itsuka]

“T-that girl...”

That was definitely Shido’s sister · Kotori’s tanzaku. Shido’s facial muscles twitched, his eyebrows started creasing

—Suddenly, he noticed that there seemed to be smudges on the right side of her wish.

“...”

It was very unlikely that imouto-sama would write incorrectly. She probably wrote some unsightly insults, so she had no choice but to rewrite. Shido heaved a sigh, at the same time using his finger to scratch his face before turning to look at his tanzaku once more. Looks like there was no need to be overly serious. Shido intended to write [I wish that all Spirits will obtain happiness]—before recalling that the existence of [Spirits] is a secret. So, he changed his words to read [I wish that spacequakes would not occur again, let there be peace on earth.]. Although it sounds more subtle, the meaning behind it is generally the same.

“Let’s leave it like that...”

Saying that, Shido turned to look at Kurumi’s direction. To be honest, in regards to what wish she would be writing, it would be impossible not to feel curious.

“Kurumi, what did you write?”

As he spoke, Shido glanced at the tanzaku in her hands. However Kurumi immediately flipped that tanzaku over, preventing him from seeing it.

“Fufu, that’s a no no, you dare peek at a maiden’s secrets, Shido-san is a mean person.”

Kurumi displayed an alluring smile, raising her index finger, swiftly pressing onto Shido’s lips.

“You...!”

“Fufu, Shido-san’s reaction is really cute.”

“D-don’t tease me anymore.”

Shido wiped his lips with his arm, Kurumi on the other hand started to happily giggle.

“Never mind that, in short, you’re done as well right? Then let’s hang our tanzaku on the branches.”

Hearing his words, Kurumi obediently nodded her head.

“Yeah, then where shall we hang it?”

“Well... there’s a saying, the closer you hang it to the heavens, the higher the chance that the wish would come true...”

“Closer to the heavens... then that means, over there?”

Kurumi pointed up to the sky, over there, a massive bamboo with a height taller than the roof of the building swayed with the wind. Such a height could not be reached, so there were no tanzaku hung there.

“Um, that really is high... but that’s too dangerous. Look, there’s some space on the bamboo over there, let’s hang it there.”

“Mm, alright.”

Shido and Kurumi both held their tanzaku in their hands, walking forwards under the cover of the leaves. Nearing the end of the road, one could see that there was still space to hang tanzaku.

“Yeah, then let’s hang these here.”

Saying that, Shido stretched out his hand, hanging his tanzaku onto the branch. However, Kurumi still held onto her tanzaku, not moving from her spot. Shido saw that, tilting his head in confusion.

“Kurumi? What’s wrong with you?”

Hearing his words, Kurumi weakly smiled before slowly speaking.

“Shido-san... You had said it before, right? Hikoboshi and Orihime, no matter how many years of rain, would never forget each other.”

“Eh? Yeah... I did say that.”

Hearing that, Kurumi, as though wishing to deeply remember this sentence, drooped her head, continuing to speak.

“Hey... Shido-san. No matter how many years of rain, will Shido-san not forget about me too?”

“Eh?”

Such a sudden question, caused Shido to hesitate.

However, Kurumi did not seem to be making fun of him. So, after Shido thought for a few seconds, he nodded to Kurumi.

“Yes, I won’t forget you. A girl with such a strong presence as you, I can’t forget even if I wanted to.”

Shido bitterly smiled as he replied.

“Is that so?”

Hearing that, Kurumi let out a satisfied smile.

“What’s with you... what a strange fellow. Alright, let’s hurry up and hang the tanzaku shall we? If you don’t want me to look at what you wrote, I can step back for a while—”

“No.”

However, Kurumi shook her head from side to side.

“Looks like... time is already up.”

“Time is... up?”

Hearing Kurumi’s words that held a deeper meaning, Shido couldn’t help but frown. And in the next instant—

“—I finally found you, [Me].”

From behind Kurumi—within the dark alley separated from the hustle and bustle of the busy street, he heard such a voice.

“What...”

After that, the moment he saw the figure that materialized, Shido was rendered speechless. It was beautiful, wearing a long skirt that had vermillion and black interwoven like blood and shadow, black hair tied into two uneven bunches on both sides, as well as heterochromatic eyes.

Furthermore, that face— There was no question about it, it was Kurumi herself. The Kurumi who was standing in the shadows, parted her lips slightly.

“You really went and did some selfish things... But, it all ends here. A clone that doesn’t obey my will, will only stand in my way if you exist.”

“A clone...?!”

Shido widened his eyes, looking at the Kurumi who was holding her tanzaku. Kurumi was able to extract as well as hide copies of her past self in her shadows completely, that was something that he had understood last month. —But, don’t tell me, the Kurumi that was with him the entire day all this while, was actually a clone. Shido’s head was in the midst of chaos. On the other

hand, standing in the shadows—Kurumi's [real body] bent her knees slightly while pinching the ends of her skirt, bowing to Shido.

"It's really been a while, Shido-san. I'm really sorry, my incompetent clone seemed to have given you some trouble."

"This.. What on earth is going on?"

Shido's confusion could be told from his expression. Hearing such a question, the real Kurumi looked at her clone from the corner of her eye, lazily starting to explain.

"I've said it before right, my clones are my past, my experiences. The [Kurumi Tokisaki] standing over there is the same, she was taken out of a random instant of my past, another personality. It's just that, the instant where I had taken her out was really from a terrible moment."

"Terrible...?"

The real Kurumi nodded her head.

"That [Me] was when I was replenishing my clones... I accidentally recreated her from the time when Shido-san was talking to my other self on the roof last month... I really don't know whether it can be counted as a prank from god."

"Wha—"

Shido was speechless. He still recalled clearly. Last month, on top of Raizen High School, Shido and Kurumi had indeed spoken to each other. Not only did the Kurumi of that time expand a barrier within the school, she also attempted to trigger a spacequake. Shido on the other hand successfully persuaded her to stop, but the moment Kurumi was about to reciprocate his feelings— At that moment, the original Kurumi showed up, and killed that Kurumi.

"Then that means, you're Kurumi, from that time...?"

"..."

Kurumi did not reply, she merely revealed a sad smile. Looking at her, the real Kurumi impatiently sighed.

"I'm really sorry, a clone that doesn't listen to my orders cannot be left alone— especially [Me] who already had developed feelings for Shido-san."

Saying that, the real Kurumi slowly raised her right arm, and —swiftly formed a fist. Following that, Kurumi's feet sprouted countless pale arms, slowly pulling her into the darkness.

“Ku—Kurumi...!”

Shido hastily extended his arm, hoping to grab Kurumi’s hand—However it was already too late.

“Shido-san. Today—I was happy, really...”

Kurumi did not make any form of resistance, she let the white arms wrap around herself, until her figure was completely submerged by the darkness. It was as though... she had already known that she would meet such an end from the start.

“Kuru..mi...”

“...Killing the same [Me] twice, what an unpleasant feeling.”

The real Kurumi said as such, at the same time she pinched her skirt just like before, dipping her head and making a bow.

“I’ve done what I’m here to do for today. I originally wished to talk more with Shido-san...”

The real Kurumi said while looking behind Shido. Almost simultaneously—

“Shido—!”

“Back off!”

A familiar voice sounded out, and in the next instant, Tohka and Kotori suddenly appeared, standing in front of Shido.

“T-Tohka—Kotori?”

Shido called out their names in surprise. He had just finished speaking, and Yoshino, too, arrived beside him. Although Yoshino widened her eyes due to her not being able to understand the situation, upon looking at the strong reactions of Tohka and Kotori, she took Shido’s hand in hers in a bid to protect him.

“Kurumi...! Don’t you dare harm Shido!”

“You have the guts to appear unannounced. What’s the matter today? If you intend to obediently surrender, then I’ll be merciful and listen to your pleas of forgiveness.”

Hearing Tohka and Kotori’s words, Kurumi shook her head in exasperation, turning to look at Shido once more.

“—It is unfortunate that the terrifying Spirit of flames is here to interrupt, I’ll take my leave here—Take care, Shido-san.”

Saying that, Kurumi's figure disappeared into the darkness. Almost instantly, all the tension in the air evaporated as well. At the same time, Tohka, who was standing in front of Shido, turned around.

"S-Shido! Are you alright!"

"...Yeah, I'm fine."

Shido replied in a low voice, before gritting his teeth, forcefully smashing his fist onto the ground.

"Kurumi...!"

Last month, the clone who was killed by the real Kurumi. It was a mystery as to why she reappeared in front of Shido. Her true intention is still unknown even till now. But—the only thing he can understand is. Even though Kurumi knew that she would once again be killed by the real Kurumi, she still chose to meet with Shido. Just for a few hours of memories, she chose to defy the absolute will of [Herself].

"...!!"

An indescribable feeling surged within him, Shido once again swung his fist.

"S-Shido..."

Tohka called out his name out of concern. However, Shido's head was still in a mess. Many kinds of emotions broiled into a chaotic whirlpool, causing rational thought to be impossible. At that moment.

"...Shido. what's that?"

Kotori's voice sounded out to him from behind. Hearing that, Shido raised his head slightly—opening his eyes. At the spot where the Kurumi clone was consumed by the shadows, the interleaving paper containing the photo was left, as well as—a small strip of paper.

"Tan, zaku..."

Looking at that, Shido unsteadily stood up, picking up the tanzaku that had fallen to the ground. After that, he looked at the words written on it.

"..."

Shido bit down hard, as though attempting to draw blood from his gums. He held the tanzaku in his hand, wordlessly walking down the street.

“Ah... Shido! Where are you going!”

Tohka’s voice sounded out from behind him, but Shido ignored her, tearing a path through the crowd, and he continued to walk forward. Finally, he arrived in front of the tallest bamboo that Kurumi had said earlier, holding the tanzaku in his mouth, he climbed the nearby telephone pole to the building’s roof. His actions quickly attracted the attention of nearby visitors, murmurings started to sound out from the ground.

However Shido did not take them to heart, he stepped onto the roof, extending his hand to the largest branch on the bamboo. And then, while maintaining an unnatural position, he hung the tanzaku in his mouth on the very top of the bamboo. However,

“Wah...!”

The instant he hung the tanzaku onto the branch, Shido’s foot lost its balance, he fell from the roof. His vision started to spin violently, the murmurings of the crowd turned into screams.

“Shido—!”

However, at the same time he heard the voice, a second before Shido’s body hit the ground, he was caught firmly. Looks like Tohka who had caught up had saved his life.

“Are you okay, Shido!”

“Oh, yeah... I’m saved, Tohka.”

“What’s the matter with you, running off like that.”

“Aaah... I’m here to hang the tanzaku.”

“Hm?”

Tohka frowned, raising her head and looking up. On the very top of the tallest bamboo, the lone tanzaku was right there swaying in the wind.

“Hanging it over there? Uh, that really was dangerous.”

“Yeah... I’m sorry. But it’s just... that wish, I’d like that to come true no matter what.”

Saying that, Shido followed Tohka and looked upwards—in the swaying bamboo leaves, the hint of a small single tanzaku could be glimpsed.

[I hope that one day, I will be able to meet Shido-san once more. Tokisaki Kurumi]

“I won’t forget you... How could I possibly forget about you?” Shido clenched his fist, looking at the night sky as though making a pledge. In the midst of the glittering sea of stars, a small single shooting star flew across the sky, as though flying across the Milky way.

Allow us to celebrate Dramaga

Kotori: Celebrate! Dragon Magazine's 25th anniversary!

Shido: Wait, what are you suddenly saying, Kotori...? And while we're at it, where are we?

Tohka: Mmm... It's rather colorful suddenly. We're usually just black and white, two colors all the time.

Origami: ...

Yoshino: Umm... Is something about to start?

Yoshinon: Ooooh, Everyone's assorted here huh?

Kotori: We have everyone assembled here for none other than this. Now, let's start with everyone's names.

Tohka: Mine's Yatogami Tohka!

Origami: Tobiichi Origami.

Yoshino: I'm... Yoshino...

Shido: I'm Itsuka Shido, but...

Kotori: And I'm Itsuka Kotori. Now that we're this far, you should know right?

Shido: No clue whatsoever. Explain it?

Kotori: Pathetic huh? Look closely. Everyone's name includes a number and added together it adds up perfectly to [25]. Therefore the currently assembled faces are members specifically chosen to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Dragon Magazine

Tohka: Wha, What did you say?

Shido: Ah, yeah. But what a great accident. Everyone's name has a number in it.

Kotori: Yeah, it really is a great accident huh? (all in katakana)

Shido: Why are you suddenly talking like that? (referring to the all katakana)

Kotiri: You're not supposed to notice that

Origami: ...Sweet

Kotori: Huh?

Origami: Just assembling the numbers and reaching 25 is something we can't say.

Kotiri: Hm, then what should we do

Origami: That's easy. We just need to combine it.

Tohka: C... Combine?

Origami: Yes. Not just assembling but getting everyone to combine, then we can really celebrate the 25th anniversary properly.

Yoshino: Uhh, what do you mean by that?

Origami: Practicing. ... Shido, you should go to a room over there and combine with me.

Shido: Uhh, what are you trying to do?

Tohka: Wait! I also want to go practice with Shido!

Shido: Do you even understand what you're saying Tohka?!

Origami: No Problem. You guys can combine in a different way.

Tohka: Oh? Do you really mean it...?

Origami: I mean it. Become our flesh and blood and continue to live on.

Shido: What are you guys trying to do?!

Kotori: Okay Okay. We're supposed to be celebrating DraMaga, shouldn't we not do things that would easily get us banned and be more peaceful?

Yoshino: Uhm... Well, how about we do this?

Shido: Huh?

Kotori: ...Uhh, Tohka, Shido, Tobiichi Origami line up and get in a crawling position, then on top of that will be me and Yoshino. Then on the very top...

Yoshinon: Will be Yoshinon!

Shido: ...Well, I guess if you're being literal, this is combining in a sense

Tohka: Ooooooh... a spectacular pyramid! The 25th anniversary is great!

Shido: Su, sure...?

Origami: Shido. As I thought, this wouldn't be enough. You should combine with me.

Shido: N... no, wait

Tohka: Hey...?! You bastard, what are you doing?!

Shido: Hey, both of you, If you quarrel even in this situation, we'll crumble... Waaaaaaa
(*falling noises*)

Afterword

Long time no see, or should I say nice to meet you? I am Tachibana Koushi.

What do you think of <Date A Live Encore>? I will feel honored if my readers like this book.

You must have found out that this is not a sequel. That being said, obviously <Date a Live> isn't over. This is just a short story collection.

I wrote this in the afterword of volume seven too. In terms of the story of <Date a Live>, the girls who appeared can't have their stories described with just those stories. Therefore, this time the plan is to focus on each girl with short stories to fill in the gaps. This time specifically covers Tohka, Origami, Yoshino, Kotori, and the yamai sisters that were previously published in <Dragon Magazine> as well as three additional short stories that were created for this collection.

Therefore, this is the afterward for my first short story collection.

Having said that, the content of this light novel is different, but the afterword isn't so I originally wanted to write as usual, but a problem came up.

I mostly finished the manuscript by writing what was basically a first draft then reducing the length. As a result, each time the page count shrinks, so does the afterword.

While there are previously unpublished stories this time, since they are included in the article posted on <Dragon Magazine> it's very different from the usual. As a result, this afterword has 8 pages.

I've never written such a long postscript before.

Since this is a collection of short stories, let me briefly explain each story. Because how many of the stories will be spoiled, readers who don't want to see any spoilers should read the novel before continuing.

Tohka Game Center

This first short story was actually written immediately after the first volume of Date a Live. Tohka is the protagonist of this story, of course, but since it's also the first time some <Dragon Magazine> readers have read <Date A Live>, the characters and dating system were explained as well. Although it was a basic story, I was still happy that I wrote it. I like the way it came out.

In fact, the dream panda bear Ronnie that appeared in this story, also appeared in color of the second OVA episode and shows an expansion in the type of products. Incidentally, it happens to look similar to Tsunako-sensei's self-portrait.

But I digress, the dream panda Ronnie has colorful fur and has two friends: a brown horse with stars named Arnikino and a frog with flowers named Pillar Quack.

Origami Impossible

<Date A Live> first appeared on the cover of <Dragon Magazine> which published this short story and anime news. I decided “after writing Tohka, let’s write Origami”. Although many parts were conceived this way, it seems that I could only imagine Shido being swallowed by Origami.

I remember the original idea was that Origami was like a “devil terminator” chasing Shido who was on a date with Tohka. That sounds terrifying, so I decided to write something different just to reduce Origami’s scariness.

I got really immersed in writing Origami’s scenes, so I didn’t have much awareness, but when I saw the illustration of Origami on <Dragon Magazine> I felt like “I did something that shouldn’t be let go”.

Yoshino Fireworks

I remember that compared to Tohka and Origami, Yoshino’s story settled down pretty smoothly. It was worthy of being Yoshino, and she was easy to write. On the contrary, when the story was submitted, it was the one that worried me the most, because the editor suddenly called me before the manuscript was delivered and I was wondering what was going on. The other party told me “This kind of manuscript can’t be delivered”.

Me: What’s the matter? Isn’t it ok?

Editor: No, the last scene is Shido finding Yoshino wet in the rain and he feels like blushing right? That’s not enough.

Me: What do you mean?

Editor: I think she should be spanked on the ass here...!

That was genius! The illustration is the result of that excellent opinion of the editor. Bravo.

Kotori Birthday

A short story about Kotori who is fully prepared and waiting for the perfect time to come on stage. When I thought about what to write, the first thing that came to mind was a birthday party. Although this is an absolutely indispensable event, it would be too long for this story.

Having said that, it feels lonely to grow older, so the story became the birthday party everyone celebrated together with Kotori. As far as plot development is concerned, most of the stories have Kotori’s hair tied with black ribbons, but this time we can give the white ribbons a few

more appearances.

Yamai Lunchtime

Summer vacation is finally over, so Yamai Kaguya and Yamai Yuzuru have joined the battle. The pair are like a stupid couple, and it was fun to write them, however it was also troublesome to think about the unique way they speak. It's also a very time consuming job to write for them.

The previous short stories are mainly for existing characters, but this time the characters didn't appear in the main story first. That's right, the Four Heavenly Kings of the school store. Readers who have read my debut work *Soukyuu no Karma* may know that I like this type of idiot the most. I think it's the charm of short stories to bring these types of characters out.

Kurumi Star Festival

Since I got the news, I wanted to publish a short story about Kurumi as part of the unpublished new manuscript. Since she hadn't been completely obsessed with Shido, it's difficult to describe her daily life not just here but also in <Dragon Magazine>, however it's necessary to show her girlier side.

If Kurumi doesn't appear, wouldn't that be deceiving everyone? Since the season was perfect, I decided to write the Star Festival theme for Kurumi. The story was originally called "Kurumi Star", but that felt sub-standard. Kurumi seemed almost as if she was going to be debuting as a singer, so I changed the name. Since <Date A Live Encore> is usually happy and cute so far, this time the theme was changed slightly to show a sadder side too. I personally really liked how this one turned out.

So this book is the same as the story, and it could only be completed after so many people put care into it. Tsunako who always draws beautiful illustrations, everyone in charge of the editing and editorial department, and the many people in publishing and sales. Thank you so much. Since there are many more stories of the girls to add, please continue to read <Dragon Magazine>.

It will be my honor to talk to you again in <Date A Live> volume 8.

Koushi Tachibana

March 2013

Disclaimer: Date A Live is owned by Kadokawa and Koushi Tachibana. This is a non-profit fan translation; please support the official release.

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- Ene